Join the Dots: creating metadata for a collection of 80 million items at The Natural History Museum, London

Thursday 6 October 2022 12:30 (45 minutes)

Details of less than 10% of the 80 million individual items in the collection at the Natural History Museum can be obtained via our Data Portal but much of it remains undigitized with other data associated with the collection recorded but not delivered in a coherent system. In 2018, 77 staff at the Natural History Museum, London, took part in a successful collections assessment exercise. 17 questions provided details of the Condition, Importance/Significance, Information available and Outreach use/potential about 2,602 Collection Units covering the entire Natural History science departments and Library and Archives. Results can be displayed and filtered via a bespoke dashboard in Microsoft Power BI, accessed via a web link available internally to all staff. The project successfully recorded the expertise of the curatorial staff and produced the first comprehensive assessment of the Natural History Museum's collection. The methodology includes first attempts to automate scoring to include other data from our collections management systems such as environmental conditions and completeness of data coverage for the individual items that we deliver via our data portal. A few case studies are provided here to show how we have used this data and continue to refine the process of data capture and delivery for analysis with a key example showing how we are using this data to plan a major move for 40% of our collection.

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Session Classification: Keynote II