

# Reviewing the compactor storage of vertebrate collections at the Natural History Museum, London

Sandra Chapman, Lil Stevens and Chris Hughes

Earth Sciences Department, Natural History Museum, Cromwell Road, London

**Background:** This extensive re-storage project has resulted in the amalgamation of three major collections of marine reptiles and amphibians in one collections area in Basement East and provided the desired 10% expansion space for new acquisitions. In order to refurbish the space and fit compactor storage, over 4,000 specimens were packed and moved using protocols\* created by SC & LS to holding areas within the Earth Sciences Department, the NHM site and NHM offsite storage then moved back in with the ichthyosaur collection from storage in Basement West.

The 'parent' Conservation Centre Project Phase 2+3 was managed by the NHM Project Office but for the Earth Science Department's Compactor Project the Task Force supplied a full time assistant curator to pack and coordinate the move and the Task Force Manager to oversee the resourcing, communication, workflows and scheduling of the Earth Sciences side working with the curator in charge of the collections (SDC) and the Core Research Labs Department conservators. The Earth Science Department's team worked with the selected company to design and install the customised units. The ES team repurposed spaces in which to store entire or parts of collections and re-used the emptied cabinets to replace faulty units across the Earth Sciences Department.

\*Packing drawers for movement and off site storage



\*Packing pallets and a Dippy model for off site storage



\*Packing mounted skeletons



\*Packed shelves & drawers ready for on site relocation



\*Packing shelved specimens



Moving to off site storage



Final stages



Going



Prepared 128m² space

Gone



Compactors installed



A network of curators, assistants, conservators, volunteers, interns, students, contractors, architects, electricians have worked to make this part of the 'parent' project happen within the wider framework of museum policies, concurrent projects and core collections work.

Project metrics: From start of physical work

Preparing 3 collections for move to 4 holding areas **5.5 months**

Preparing extra collection for move to new units **2.5 months**

Contractors decant of packed drawers + shelves **15 days**

Contractor took 7 slabs, 19 pallets & Dippy model to offsite storage **2 days**

NHM refurbishes new area & contractor builds units\* **6.5 months**

\*Installed **158 units** with **12 configurations** & maximum height of **2.4m**

Contractors decant 2 collections to move back to new area **15 days**

Unpacking specimens in new area by assisting curator & interns **40 days**

Total time taken from start of physical work: **16 months**

Packed & decanted **1440 drawers** + **646 shelves**

Other help NHM staff & students **42 person days**

Project assistant curator **14 months**; Volunteers **66 person days**

Interns: **76 person days**; Contractors **75 person days**

Thanks to Matt Porter, Lorna Steel, Martha Richter, Zoe Hughes, Terri Cleary, Joao Leite, Noemi Moran, Becks, Emma Bernard, Pip Brewer, Karen Bandon, Chie Heath, Gerardo Mazzetta, Nikki Harrison, Carmen Martin Ramos, Mike Smith, John Brookes (Edward Baden) and Alan Lawson (Polstore Storage Solutions)

**Legacy:** Along with high quality custom built collections compactor storage that can be showcased in these very popular collections, this project has developed workflows and documentation protocols for large collection moves in the future and contributes to Earth and Planetary Science Centre readiness (NHM Strategy to 2020) .

Contact email: S.Chapman@nhm.ac.uk