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highlighted the fact that the overall experiences were quite similar to ours in terms of administrative duties. It was refreshing to note that other curators also had the never-ending task of trying to convince greater powers, co-workers and others of the importance of natural history collections. It is quite clear that small, medium and large museums need to effectively put in place relevant and dynamic collections management policies that will guide the effective operations of a museum.

The common challenges of the collections management of Natural History Museums include pest management, limited funding and storage capacity. The Caribbean faces additional challenges in terms of environmental disasters from natural occurrences such as hurricanes and earthquakes and fires. Our museum currently has a disaster management policy that addresses these issues.

I was intrigued by the keynote speaker, Lord May's encouragement to museum professionals to embrace technological advancement by ensuring that the collections do not become irrelevant and antiquated. As such, many museums including ours have answered the call for more efficient databases that will provide quick access to information for the public. Our museum hosts the National Clearing House Mechanism for Jamaica in accordance with Article 18 of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) to promote and facilitate the exchange of biodiversity related information. In addition, our museum is in the process of digitizing the biological collections in order to enhance our ability to share data worldwide.

How could I travel this far and not view the British Natural History Museum collections? They are considered to be integrally related to our Jamaican collections, as one of the earliest collectors, Sir Hans Sloane, collected in Jamaica extensively during the 17th century. These collections later formed the basis for the Natural History Museum. As such the tours of various collections of the Natural History museum were of extreme personal interest to me and added spice to the whole experience. My particular interest was in the entomology and zoology collections and I got a chance to interact with the curators and collections managers, view practices and observe some preservation techniques. I received some very good ideas and useful tips on techniques and storage equipment and also recognized how similar our practices are. The tour also gave me a chance to develop links with persons that I am sure to contact in the near future.

My final day was spent at the workshop on standards. The presentations were useful and the activities allowed participants to display creativity and expertise. I was in a reflective mode throughout the workshop as I quietly evaluated our museum's current status with respect to policies. Whilst commending the achievements of our museum over the last couple of years, we have redeveloped our collections management policy; I also recognize that some fundamental areas need to be addressed.

Personally, the experience has developed within me a greater appreciation for my role as a Jamaican museum professional with a responsibility to the future generation to maintain high standards. Though our collections are smaller, our tasks are collectively bigger. We operate concurrently as curators, researchers, educators and collections managers on a day-to-day basis. It is heartening to learn that we are not alone in a world that still does not fully understand the importance of natural history collections. The overall exposure encourages a shift from the complacency that can be created within a comfort zone to that of agility and excitement. I am encouraged to share with my colleagues, all that I have seen and learnt so that our institution, though more than 120 years old, remains current and relevant within a continuously evolving society.

June 12th to 18th at the Natural History Museum, London
- Kelly Dilks, Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery

This was an interesting and illuminating conference to attend especially if like me you are relatively new to museums and are still trying to find your way through procedures and standards. The overall conference theme was Realising Standards and the conference programme did exactly that. Standards – established, experimental and inspired were explained in detail – well, as much as twenty minutes would allow. These standards explored how we as a community might take a revised look at established procedures and served as a useful refresher. Ideas, information and inspiration for changing and challenging our day-to-day working practice and innovative ways of caring for and creating access to our collections were presented.

I hope the following presentations I have chosen to outline will be of interest to those NatSCA members who could not attend the conference and for those that did I hope you would be interested to read the opin-

ions of a new kid on the block.

It seemed very interesting to me as a relative newcomer to hear so many of the speakers discussing the need to be mindful of how collections would be utilised in the future. The collectors and amassers of natural science collections did not envision some of the ways these specimens are used today. This raises the question of what will collections we hold and those amassed today be used for in the future?

I thought this was highlighted particularly well from the perspective of the importance of museum collections in monitoring bird-breeding biology and anthropomorphic changes to the environment. This was addressed by Douglas Russell in his talk "Hatching a Plan: developing modern standards in egg collections." Bird's eggs are and will continue to be an important source of taxonomic, biological, ecological, phonological and faunistic information. To Russell, bird egg collections are "archives of environmental change" He put forward that although this was not the original purpose of these collections the subsequent analysis of egg shell thickness has had provided important information on the effects of chemical agents in the environment and changes in climate on bird breeding biology over the last 150 years. If we do not actively collect in this area this valuable time series will not continue and this data will be lost. Russell offered solutions and standards for this that aid the collecting of this valuable material in what is unarguably one of the most contentious of all natural science collections.

This idea of standards for future uses of collections seems to have sparked many a discussion over coffee too. Through eaves dropping I heard mention of DNA, even atomic (!) preservation. The key to interpreting future uses would be I suppose to examine what problems our collections are helping to solve today and if these could have been foreseen i.e. climate change what implications this would have on our collecting. A very interesting area for standards to be realised I feel.

The Wednesday morning tours were an opportunity to do what any natural sciences curator loves best – to have a nosey look around other people's stores. Even here the conference theme of standards was in action. For all the interesting information and ideas from the speakers - for me the chance to look at how other people look after their collections is as useful in terms of standards as any presentation. I have come back to my own museum brimming with ideas for making the most of the space and small budget we have available.

For all the ideas, hands to help do the work are a perennial problem for all of us. Julia Sigwart and Nigel Monaghan have certainly made me think about how to attract and retain more volunteers into our department from their presentation on "Adult education as a tool for volunteer training and recruitment." Being across the road from the University of Plymouth does lead to a steady trickle of undergraduates and graduates (myself included) asking for experience. Although this affords us some reassurance that they are familiar with some of the specimens understanding of collections is not something that is addressed in most degree programmes. Most only stay a few months due to other commitments. To counter this the National Museum of Ireland works in partnership with the University College Dublin to run CoBiD – Collections-based Biology in Dublin. CoBiD facilitates collections access and teaching to undergraduates through a final year taught module Biodiversity Collections Research and through working with the University an opportunity to re-connect with the research community.

Like Dublin, our other catchment group of volunteers are retired persons. The programme set out by Sigwart and Monaghan sets standards for training and retaining these volunteers through an adult education programme. "Dead Zoo" has capacity for eighteen learners and runs for two hours for six weeks on Mondays when the museum is closed, for six weeks. The curriculum is discussion of selected readings and a lecture. This is supported by an independent project. Taking on volunteers through this programme has solved many of the problems that volunteers pose to a department such as natural history. They actually receive training in the ideas behind museums and collections. The intake is all at the same time and requires minimal orientation. Most importantly the programme gives the appearance of more rewards than a cup of tea and a biscuit. Holding the programme on a day when the museum is closed to the public and allowing them access to collections not normally on exhibit gives an air of exclusivity.

It is difficult in this short article to fully do justice to the benefits the conference has provided me with. I am sincerely grateful to NatSCA for the bursary that enabled me to participate in the conference. It was good to meet so many NatSCA members and I look forward to meeting many more of you at the spring meeting.