

We often use specialist equipment in museums when caring for our collections, however, sometimes we find that everyday items can be put to use. Last week we were taught how a make-up sponge can be used to clean our feathered and furry collections.

Nicola Crompton, who trained in conservation at Lincoln University, came to show us how to smarten up our Natural History collection ready for display in the new museum.



Nicola showing Gill how to clean a dormouse

We began by wiping down the feathers (or fur) of our chosen specimen with either a cosmetic sponge or a special piece of cloth called a 'Dust Bunny'. These create static which causes the dust and dirt to stick to them. It was amazing how effective they were and lovely to see the bright colours on the birds reappear.



Cleaning the feathers of a blackbird with a Dust Bunny

Gill also tackled a hedgehog, its very sharp quills meant that a different technique had to be used. She used a small brush to brush the dust off and into a vacuum cleaner. The end of the vacuum cleaner's pipe is covered with a gauze (the gauze lets the small dust particles through but if any small piece of the object comes away during cleaning it is collected on the gauze and can then be kept and possibly reattached).

We then moved on to the eyes, beaks, feet and claws. We used a sticky substance called

'Groomstick' which is rolled into a small ball and stuck on the end of a cocktail stick. This can then be dabbed on to the eyes etc. and the dirt sticks to it. For eyes that were really dull we used a damp cotton wool swab and the eyes of all the animals were soon sparkling again.



Using a damp cotton wool swab to clean the eyes of a Tawny Owl

Finally, tweezers, pins and cotton wool swabs were used to very carefully tease feathers back into place where they had got twisted or misshapen and by the end of the day we had a table full of animals looking ready for their brand new display next year!

Many thanks to Nicola and our Natural History volunteer Bob Press for spending the day with us and sharing their expertise.

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