Volunteer Role Description: Bird Skins Collection Volunteer

About the opportunity
The Museum of Natural History’s collection of bird skins contains over 17,000 specimens from around the world and represents almost 5,000 different species. People can search a database of the collection; however, very few specimens have been photographed.

Rob Douglas, the Life Collections Assistant, is looking for 1 or 2 volunteers to help (quite literally) create a better picture of the collection. This will involve volunteers:

- photographing specimens and linking the photographs to database records
- cross-checking information on labels and the database
- keeping an eye out for, and reporting, any signs of pest damage
- re-bagging or re-boxing specimens where current storage is damaged

Checking for signs of pests and replacing damaged storage will help to preserve the physical specimens for the future; photographing them will make them more digitally accessible to researchers and other interested individuals around the world.

Training and timing
Rob will induct and train volunteers in safe handling of natural history specimens, as well as basic pest recognition and assessment, photography, and use of the database. A lot of this will happen ‘on the job’ during the first few weeks, and he will remain on hand to answer questions beyond that.

We would ideally like volunteers to come in for a weekly(ish) half-day shift, e.g. 10 am - 1 pm / 1.30 - 4.30 pm, any weekday except Tuesday. There is no specific finish date, but we hope that volunteers will be able to help long enough to put their training into practice. Rob will regularly check in with volunteers about their progress and satisfaction, and will review the role every few months or as each taxonomic group is completed.
Who are we looking for?
Because this role is about taking clear photos, reviewing information on labels and the database, and looking for signs of infestation or damage, we feel it would particularly suit volunteers who:

- enjoy doing methodical, repetitive tasks, with attention to detail and a steady hand
- are comfortable reading small text
- are accurate typists and confident to learn new computer software

An interest in birds will likely make the task more interesting but isn’t necessary; likewise, confidence using a digital camera would be great but isn’t necessary.

Why volunteers might enjoy this opportunity
We hope that volunteers will find the role interesting and fulfilling! It’s a chance to:

- connect with the Museum and meet staff and other volunteers
- handle important and beautiful bird skin specimens, and gain an insight into how they are documented and stored
- potentially learn about / pursue or develop an interest in birds (we think the opportunity will be a great introduction to bird taxonomy and morphology)
- help the Museum to make its collections more informative and accessible online
- potentially contribute to the Museum’s social media – if you would like to share something about your volunteering

Other practicalities

- The space where this volunteering can happen is only accessible by stairs. It also has a certain odour, which some volunteers might find off-putting.
- Some bird skins have been preserved with toxic chemicals in the past. Volunteers will need to wear nitrile (non-latex) gloves in order to handle the specimens, in accordance with the risk assessment.
- We will encourage volunteers to work at the computer in a comfortable way, including taking breaks as necessary – volunteers are welcome to get a drink and bring something to eat in the staff room if they would like to.
- This role is open to volunteers aged 18+.
- Volunteers can claim travel expenses up to £5 per volunteering session.
- Volunteers new to onsite GLAM volunteering will need to be registered on the Volunteer Service mailing list (MyImpactPage.com), and the Volunteer Service will need to have received two references and done an ID check before volunteers can start in this role. The role does not require any additional checks.

How to apply
If you think you would suit and enjoy this role, then please email Caroline at volunteering@ glam.ox.ac.uk by the end of the day on Monday 27th May. Please
include a few lines about why you’re interested (no more than 100ish words), and let us know any preference regarding a potential volunteering slot in the coming months, e.g. Wed a.m., any day except Fri, etc.

We are only looking for 1 or 2 volunteers. Caroline will pass applications on to the Volunteer Supervisor, Rob, after the deadline, and someone will be in touch as soon as possible after that. Depending on the level of interest, Rob may invite potential volunteers to meet him to find out more, prior to offering anyone the opportunity.