

**Elephant dung, chewed antlers, weathered bones: documenting a unique taphonomic collection**  
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The Antony John Sutcliffe Collection is a unique taphonomic reference collection held within the Department of Earth Sciences at the Natural History Museum (NHM). Sutcliffe was the Curator of Fossil Mammals at the NHM from 1957 to 1987, during which time he collected a large assemblage of modern comparative vertebrate material, including complete skulls, bones, teeth and soft tissues (skin and faeces) of numerous species from across the world including sites in East Africa, Canada, Alaska, Siberia and northwest Europe. Sutcliffe studied Pleistocene mammals and was particularly interested in the alterations to their remains after death and how they come to be fossilised, i.e., their taphonomy.

The specimens were either collected during Sutcliffe's own fieldwork or gifted to him by international colleagues, and are often accompanied by detailed notes on their provenance and original letters of donation.

After a preliminary study in 2013, and given the value of the collection for future taphonomic studies, a curatorial project ran from 2015 to 2017 aiming to document the entire collection on EMu (the museum's collection management system), recording the anatomy, taxonomy, previous and new locations within the museum, and any associated documentation of over 1500 specimens. Photographs of each object were included and all specimens have been registered, safely repacked and rehoused at Wandsworth museum store, where they are now accessible to researchers. The specimens have the potential to form curated taphonomic reference standards for use by researchers around the world.