Conference Report: Connecting with the Crowd

16 June 2017, The Natural History Museum, London

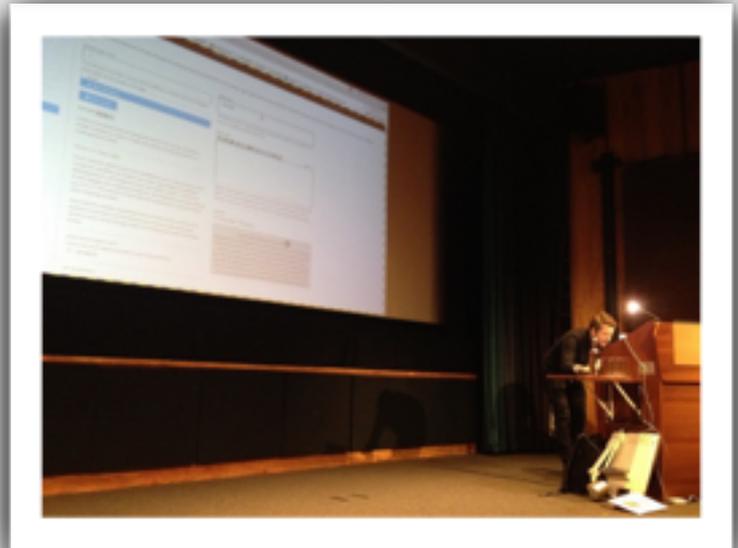Report compiled by Kath Castillo and Lucy Robinson, 15 September 2017

Summary and purpose of the conference

This one day cross-disciplinary conference explored best practices and new perspectives on crowdsourcing citizen science.

Crowdsourcing projects and platforms abound, involving over one million citizen scientists in the analysis or interpretation of images and data online. This conference aimed to showcase the latest tools, technologies and approaches available to engage and collaborate with diverse audiences online, and to invite delegates to help shape the future of crowdsourcing.
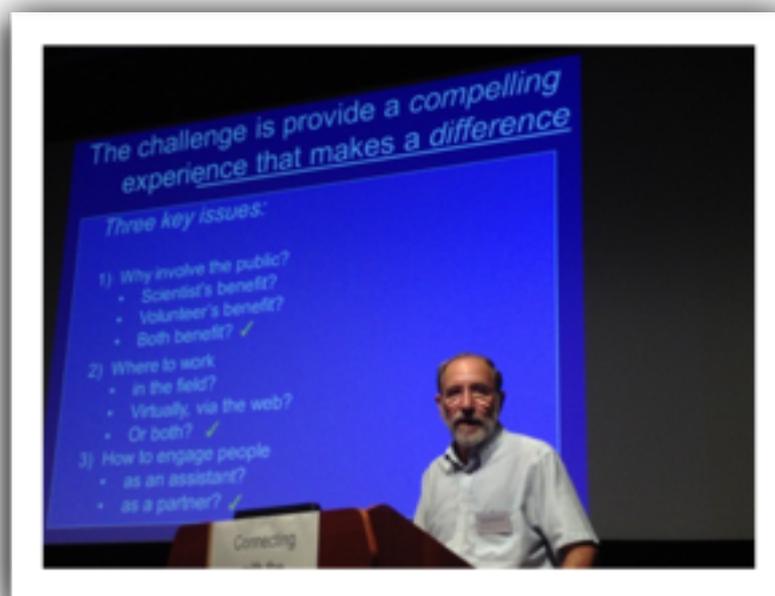
A busy programme of talks

Hosted by The Natural History Museum, the day opened with an excellent keynote from Prof. Chris Lintott from the University of Oxford's Zooniverse team, who set the scene for the day by reflecting on *Planets, Penguins and People: Lessons from a decade of citizen science*.

131 delegates from a wide variety of backgrounds attended, including representatives of universities and NGOs, charities, research organisations and students. We were pleased to welcome speakers from the USA, France, Belgium and the UK who delivered a varied programme of 17 presentations and speed talks. They shared their experiences of developing and running crowdsourcing projects, showcased the different platforms and technologies available, and reflected on the participant experience and strategies to maximise the impacts of crowdsourcing. We learned a huge amount and took home many lessons learned from research, technological and engagement perspectives.

The conference closed with an inspiring keynote from Prof. Dan Rubenstein from Princeton University who reminded us of the importance of involving people in science, with his presentation *Power to the People: Nature and science benefit when people are engaged.*

Discussion, networking and interactive formats

In between the packed schedule of talks we had plenty of time for coffee, discussion, networking and two interactive formats to build capacity for crowdsourcing. Demonstrations at the *Project Showcase* gave delegates the chance to meet platform developers and project owners to discuss in detail how projects are created and view demonstrations of how different platforms work. A particular highlight was seeing Dr Grant Miller from the Zooniverse team demonstrating how to build a citizen science project from scratch in under 3 minutes! The *Collaborative Wish-list Wall* allowed delegates to share their ideas, questions and wishes for future functionality on crowdsourcing platforms — information which can be shared with platform developers to inform future investment.

What next?

Best practices and lessons learned gathered from the speakers at *Connecting with the Crowd* will be combined with outcomes and lessons learned shared at the *One billion wildlife observations: Crowdsourcing digital collections* symposium held at the Citizen Science Association conference in Minnesota just three weeks before. These lessons will be collated into a best practice guide for crowdsourcing, so please keep an eye out for that later this year!

Presentations are available on SlideShare http://bit.ly/2v3UVNM and a summary of the Collaborative Wish-list Wall is in a GoogleDoc http://bit.ly/2uaw10e.
All the talks were filmed and we are currently editing them. To date, there are three video presentations available online:

Professor Chris Lintott, Oxford University
Planets, Penguins and People: Lessons from a decade of citizen science
https://youtu.be/L3FQxpV3L1Q

Professor Dan Rubenstein, Princeton University
Power to the People: Nature and science benefit when people are engaged
https://youtu.be/tCqnFvuP870

Dr Geoff Belknap, University of Leicester
"[M]any are better than one, when hard work is to be done," Studying People-Powered research in the 19th and 21st Centuries
https://youtu.be/SOFMzgpbigY

Evaluation and lessons learned

It is important for us as an organisation and for our sponsors to ensure that our events are meeting the needs of the community and offering good value to delegates. Evaluation forms were distributed to all delegates on the day, and were completed by 39 delegates (30% return rate). When asked to give an overall rating for the conference from 1 (poor) to 10 (excellent), respondents gave an average score of 8.8. 87% of respondents said that the most useful aspect of the day was the presentations, and 95% rated the conference as meeting or exceeding their expectations.

We also picked up a real appetite among delegates for a more regular programme of similar events in the future and we'd also like to build on some of the lessons learned through the interactive elements of the conference; in particular, we'd like to explore formats that allow us to hear from volunteers who participate in citizen science projects.

Evaluation comments were very positive; here's a selection of feedback we received:

"Really enjoyed the day. I found the range of case studies really stimulating and thought provoking"

"A great day — masses of expertise packed in. Thank you"

"I liked the integration of science and humanities projects"

"Really varied talks. Interesting food for thought. Very well done"

"Fascinating day — thank you very much. I learnt a great deal. Lovely atmosphere!"

Acknowlegements