

Guidelines for Visiting Researchers to the USNM Mammal Collection

These guidelines are in place to protect the collections and the individuals working with them, and to ensure the security of the department. All visitors are expected to be familiar with these policies and we reserve the right to revoke visitor privileges at our discretion. Visitors must also comply with the NMNH collection policy as well as all applicable Smithsonian policies and procedures.

Hours and access

All visitors are required by the Smithsonian to be issued visitor passes; unannounced visits can be difficult to accommodate due to the security process. Please visit [Visitor Information](#) and complete the [Visitor Registration Form](#) well in advance of your anticipated arrival to make arrangements.

The Mammal Division is open to visitors Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. except on [Federal Holidays](#).

Assistants

Anyone working in the collection is required to be issued a visitors badge. Information about assistants must be entered on the [Visitor Registration Form](#) when submitting a request to visit the collection. If you need to add an assistant after placing a request, submit a [Visitor Registration Form](#) for them individually two weeks prior to your visit.

Security Clearance Requirements

After an accrual of 30 days within a 365 day period visiting any Smithsonian Institution museum, a background check is required. If you know you will be visiting for more than 30 days within 365 days, please notify us as soon as possible so we can begin this process. In our experience, this can take several weeks.

Equipment

We have a limited number of dissecting microscopes and copy stands available for visitor use. Please make sure to note on your [Visitor Registration Form](#) if you will need access to this equipment. Visitors must bring any other necessary equipment and accessories with them. If you are bringing in comparative material that could be easily confused with our specimens, make sure this is noted on the [Visitor Registration Form](#). If you have any questions regarding equipment and availability, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Food and Drink

Visitors may have a re-sealable water bottle with them while working in the collection but no other food or drink is allowed. Both the NMNH and MSC have a cafeteria, microwave, and refrigerator that are available for visitor use.

Collection Organization

In our collection, specimens are ordered systematically to Order, Family, and Genus. Species and subspecies under Genus are stored alphabetically. After the lowest taxonomic breakdown (whether species or subspecies), specimens are arranged alphabetically by country and state/province if the country is the United States, Mexico, or Canada. Following country or state/province, specimens are arranged in ascending numerical order by catalog number. Collection order runs from left to right, and front to back within drawers, which are arranged from top to bottom. It is extremely important to put specimens back in the correct location.

Handling Specimens

Many of our specimens are over hundred years old and still in great condition. To maintain the condition of all our specimens, all specimens must be treated with extreme care and respect. Before and after handling specimens, please wash your hands. Use trays and carts to transport specimens, never place a specimen on the floor. Only remove specimens from the cabinets that

you can work with in a single work session. Put all specimens away at the end of the work day and when taking a lunch break. All cabinets need to be kept closed and locked when not actually removing or returning specimens. Cases are to be closed while studying removed specimens. Tags are not to be removed from specimens or postcranial elements disarticulated without consulting a Collection Manager. Removal of tissue from any specimen requires an approved [Destructive Sampling Request](#).

If you have any problems or concerns when handling specimens, please do not hesitate to contact a staff member for assistance.

Reporting

We ask visitors to please notify a staff member of any signs of a live pest infestation, misplaced specimens, or suspected incorrect data such as specimen misidentification (please do not make any corrections).

Chemicals in the Collection

Many of the specimens (skins and skeletons) in the dry collections were treated during preparation with a variety of chemicals that may have left residues behind, including organic hydrocarbons. Study skins and mounted skins may have been treated on the inside of the specimen with arsenic, either as a powder, as a powder mixed with alum, or wet as arsenical soap. A small percentage of the skin collection was treated with mercuric chloride. Other unrecorded chemicals may have been used in the preparation of some specimens. During specimen preparation some study skins and mounts were degreased with dichloroethylene, carbon tetrachloride, or other unrecorded chemicals. A very small percentage of skeleton specimens were cleaned with Trypsin. In the past, collection fumigation for insect pests used chemicals including Dowfume© or Vulcan72© (both combinations of ethylene dichloride and carbon tetrachloride). More recently, actual pest infestations are spot treated with para-dichlorobenzene (PDB) crystals. Fluid preserved specimens have been fixed with 10% formalin and preserved in 70% ethanol. The division maintains a supply of gloves for use by researchers

upon request. Make sure to wash your hands before and after handling specimens. There is also to be no eating, drinking, or storing food in collection ranges or around specimens. For additional information contact one of the collection managers. Additionally MSDS safety sheets are available for currently used chemicals

Evacuation Procedure and Safety

In the event of a museum emergency, listen for and follow the instructions broadcast over the security loudspeakers. In case of an evacuation, the designated point of meeting for the Division of Mammals at NMNH is on the National Mall across from the east end (towards the Capitol) of the museum and for MSC Pod 2 is the parking area beyond the sculpture through the entrance by which you entered MSC. If you are asked to evacuate, please do not worry about specimens or equipment, and leave the building immediately. If you experience an emergency, call NMNH security at 3-3066 or MSC security (main entrance) at 8-1156 from any of the museum phones. If you call 911 directly it is advised to also notify security so that they can help coordinate the fastest response.

Publications

When publishing on specimens examined, we ask that you please reference our specimens using the standard USNM initials in combination with the specimen's unique catalog number (e.g. USNM 567123). These initials are the standard descriptor for our institution, and the number denotes a specific specimen in our collection. When you properly cite specimens examined by their "USNM number" you make it possible for everyone to associate your research with our specimens. In doing so, you not only improve the quality of your reporting, but you help us justify the continued existence of our research collection.

It may be of interest that the initials USNM stand for an older name for our museum, and that for the sake of consistency, we continue to refer to our specimens by their USNM numbers. Some of these USNM numbers can be traced back through the scientific literature for more than a century, thus demonstrating how our specimens contribute to science year after year.

In recent decades, the proper name for our museum has been the National Museum of Natural History, but we still reference the individual specimens in our collection by their USNM number. Thus you cite specimens in the National Museum of Natural History (NMNH) by their unchanging USNM number, and we look forward to seeing your future papers continuing in this tradition.

Finally, as a courtesy, we ask that you please alert us to any publications resulting from your use of our specimens. If you send us a citation, or better yet, a pdf, we will be able to make note of your work in the catalog record for every specimen examined. We remember our visitors, and we really enjoy reading the results of your work, and in seeing how our collections are contributing to the advance of science.

Questions

If you have any questions about these guidelines or about visiting the collections please contact Darrin Lunde at 202-633-1253 or lunded@si.edu.