Collection Development Policy for the Department of Vertebrate Paleontology

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This is a draft of a potential Collection Development policy for the Department of Vertebrate Paleontology of the Carnegie Museum of Natural History.
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I. Introduction

A. Mission Statement

The Carnegie Museum of Natural History conducts scientific inquiry, generates knowledge, and promotes stewardship of the Earth. Through public engagement, we share the joy of discovery about the processes that shape the diversity of our world and its inhabitants (CMNH Web Site).

B. Establishment and Accreditation

The Carnegie Institute was established in Pittsburgh in 1895 by philanthropist Andrew Carnegie. It has since been divided into four distinctive Museums, the Carnegie Museum of Natural History included.

In 2009, the Carnegie Museum of Natural History received accreditation from the Association of American Museums. The AAM officially recognizes our commitment to excellence, accountability, high professional standards, and continued institutional improvement (CMNH Web Site). Every department of the Carnegie Museum of Natural History embodies these ideals, in particular our Department of Vertebrate Paleontology.

II. Statement of Purpose, Description, and Goals

A. History of the Vertebrate Collection

The Vertebrate Paleontology section of the Carnegie Museum of Natural has been existence since the inception of the museum in 1895. The first vertebrate exhibition to draw a large crowd was an almost complete skeleton of the American mastodon. It was not long after that dinosaur fever swept the nation and our founder, Andrew Carnegie, made it his primary goal to acquire a complete dinosaur specimen for the collection. Carnegie provided funds for paleontological research with the eventual fruition of a nearly complete dinosaur which was
named *Diplodocus carnegii*. Carnegie patronized an unprecedented nine casts of the dinosaur to be sent as gifts to other museums in Europe and Latin America.

The year 1903 marked the purchase of a private collection known as the Bayet Collection that included fossil plants, invertebrates, and vertebrates. This collection put the Department of Vertebrate Paleontology on the map with the Western Hemisphere's finest collection of Jurassic pterosaurs and fishes. This momentum started the early exploration of our vertebrate paleontologists in the Montana and Nebraska areas and in 1905 it led to the discovery of the site now known as the Agate Springs Fossil Beds National Monument. Field work continued in the Mid-America and Western America through the 1930s and 1950s with a complete revival of the Museum's collecting and research in Wyoming in 1960.

Our current holdings are approximately 103,000 specimens, ranging in age from Late Silurian to Quaternary. These specimens encompass a wide range of vertebrate classes with 376 primary types. Some highlights include: Permo-Carboniferous tetrapods and fishes, Jurassic fish, Jurassic and Cretaceous dinosaurs of the American West, Late Paleocene mammals of the same region, and Miocene vertebrates from Samos, Greece, and western Montana (Department of Vertebrate Paleontology CMNH Web site).

**B. Continuing Goals**

It is our goal to preserve, conserve, and provide the collection for future generations. It is also the goal of the Department to continue to expand and diversify the collection for more sophisticated research and education. These goals will be achieved through the commitment to excellence and professional standards of which we have been credited.

**C. Ethics**
The majority of our staff are members of the Society of Vertebrate Paleontology. It is our desire that we uphold the goals and ethical values the Society emulates. We are committed to facilitating the cooperation of all persons concerned with the history, evolution, ecology, and comparative anatomy and taxonomy of vertebrate animals. We encourage the discovery, conservation and preservation of vertebrate fossils and fossil sites. We foster the scientific, educational and personal appreciation of these fossils and sites by avocational, student and professional paleontologists and the general public (Society of Vertebrate Paleontology Web site).

It is important that we take notice of all sections of the Society's Code of Ethics in order to best uphold these goals and continue to honor our profession. We include a short synopsis of the pertinent ideals:

1. Professional standards in collection of fossils includes detailed recording of context, geography, stratigraphy, sedimentology, and taphonomy of the fossils.
2. Adherence to regulations and property rights with all appropriate licenses and approvals from federal, state, and local governments.
3. Fossil preparation all under the supervision of trained professionals.
4. Deposition of fossil specimens curated and accessioned properly with conservation, scientific study, and education in mind.
5. Publication and education should be disseminated as quickly as possible for the scientific community and the general public.
6. Commercial sale or trade of scientifically significant fossils should not take place unless it brings them into or keeps them within the public trust (Society of Vertebrate Paleontology Web site).
III. Acquisition of Specimens

A. General

Selection for new acquisitions will be done by independent selectors on staff, and the staff as a committee with final approval given by the Scientific Preparator and Collection Manager (Evans and Sapanaro 60). Staff will be comprised of professionals, support staff, and part-time help. All will be required to take part in the acquisition process which include gift and exchange materials, approval plans and standing orders, allocation discussions, deselection decisions, collection evaluation studies, and identifying needed retrospective materials (Evans and Sapanaro 232-33). New materials will come from the vertebrate paleontologists associated with the museum from their work in the field, private collections, other museums, and other appropriate avenues.

B. Collections of Mixed Quality

With each new acquisition, the quality of the new collection will be determined by the staff as committee and the Scientific Preparator and Collection Manager. It is understood that occasionally there will be collections of mixed quality that are not up to the standards of our institution. In these instances, the questionable items will go through our criteria for deselection or destruction (Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County Collection Policy).

C. Purchases

Purchases shall not occur unless the following pertain:

1. The materials abide by the purposes and activities of the Department.

2. Proper storage, protection, and preservation can be provided in accordance with the Department’s standards.
3. The materials were not recovered under questionable circumstances and did not compromise or destroy other collecting sites, cultural movements, or human burial places.

4. It can be assured that the Department retains full ownership of the materials and therefore owns the right to make copies or reproductions in displays and exhibits along with the original objects (Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County Collection Policy).

All of this criteria will be assured by the staff as committee with final approval from the Scientific Preparator and Collections Manager with further documentation from the institution or individual from which the purchase is being made.

**D. Gifts**

As a general rule, the Department shall not add a gift to the collection unless it is something the Department would purchase outright. Gifts must adhere to the same criteria as purchases. Items will only be accepted if they match the collection profile of the existing collection or it can be accepted with the understanding that we reserve all rights to dispose of or destroy any unwanted items (Evans and Sapanaro 61-2). It will also be understood that gifts are given with no stipulations or compromises as to the Department's full ownership of the item.

**E. Appraisals**

No department in the Carnegie Natural History Museum will perform appraisals therefore this applies to our department as well. We do, however, help identify specimens through hands-on identification and through photos and e-mail. We only acquire specimens that are beneficial to our research. If the finder desires to gift the item or allow the Department to purchase it, it must meet all criteria for purchases and gifts stipulated in the last sections (CMNH Web Site).
F. Accessioning and Records

All field data (including the forms of notebooks, electronic files, photographs, and other formats) must become part of the deposited fossil collection (Society of Vertebrate Paleontology Web Site). The fossil along with the appropriate field data will be accessioned within a reasonable period of time (usually within four to six weeks of acquisition). All items will be accessioned and catalogued within the parameters in which they best belong. If new items do not meet the parameters of any existing parts of the collection, a new catalog heading will be added for the items and any future acquisitions that may fit within the parameters assigned.

IV. Deaccessioning, Deselection, and Disposal

A. Criteria

As with all institutions of our type it is pertinent that we occasionally deaccession and deselect items in order to make room for new acquisitions. Removal may occur if the items can no longer be properly stored, preserved or used. Deselection will occur with the approval of staff as committee and the final approval of the Scientific Preparator and Collections Manager. Deaccessioning and deselection will occur when it has been determined there is no future usefulness for the item. Items that will routinely be removed from the collection are duplicates, unsolicited and unwanted gifts, and obsolete items (Evans and Sapanaro 304-5). When an object is deselected for disposal, proper documentation must be prepared by the Scientific Preparator and Collections Manager and archived by the Collection Archivist for prosperity. Records should include list of the object and the accompanying field work data, reason for deselection, and avenue of disposal. It is also of importance that the Museum has full custody and rights to dispose of the object in question and follow protocol for disposal as follows:
B. Disposal

In this instance, disposal does not necessarily mean destruction of the item that has been deselectected. Disposal pertains to any of the following:

1. Deaccessioned objects may be returned to the community, state, or nation of origin.
2. Objects may be given, through exchange, to another institution wherein they may serve a similar purpose and enrich the collection.
3. Items may be sold in a public auction in the public marketplace with substantial advertising for the sale. The proceeds from the sale can only be used to obtain additional objects for the collection or to better conserve existing objects in the collection (Natural History Museum of Los Angeles Collection Policy).
4. Objects may be used in research which requires destruction of object for scientific purposes.
5. If item is too deteriorated to be useful in any of the aforementioned options, item will be destroyed in concordance with current EPA Laws and Regulations for hazardous and non-hazardous Materials (see http://www.epa.gov/lawsregs/ for more information).

Disposal shall not include:

1. Gifts
2. Exchanges with individuals
3. Given or sold privately to employees of the Carnegie Museum of Natural History or to officers, members of governing authority, or their representative.

V. Loans
The Department will participate in cooperation with other institutions and private collections for outgoing and incoming items and collections. There are several benefits to this type of cooperation. One benefit is that it will improve access by making available a wider range of materials and depth for the subject. Another benefit is that it makes it possible to stretch resources both financially and, more importantly, manpower. The most important benefit is that it improves the working relationships between our museum and other institutions. Finally, through loaning personnel become more aware of what is included or not included already in the collection (Evans and Sapanaro 342-3).

A. Outgoing

The Department will lend objects to other institutions for scholarly research and exhibition. Proposals from the institution must be submitted to the Scientific Preparator and Collections Manager for approval. The borrowing institution must provide proof of proper storage and care for the item requested. Materials on loan must have an insurance value assigned by the Museum before shipment. Some stipulations include:

1. The Department will not be lent out to individuals except for special circumstance with the approval of the Director of the Museum Board. All efforts must be made to find an appropriate establishment for the individual to have affiliation with (Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County Collection Policy).

2. In order for students or associates to borrow items, an endorsement must be received by the Scientific Preparator and Collections Manager.

3. Once an item is loaned to an institution, that institution may not loan the item out to a third part. The item loaned must remain in the possession of the borrower for the duration of the loan.
4. Maximum loan time shall be eighteen months. Loans may be renewed a month in advance of the expiration of the loan. Longer time loans can be negotiated with the Director of the Museum Board and the Scientific Preparator and Collections Manager.

B. Incoming Loans

The Department may request items for loan from other institutions for the purposes of exhibition and research. The staff member requesting the loan must prepare a proposal for the item's use and origin to be approved by the Director of the Museum and the Scientific Preparator and Collections Manager. Once the proposal has been approved appropriate measures will be taken to obtain the item up for loan. The Department will not accept any objects that have not had an insurance value determined by the owning institution. The Department must have the proper storage facilities and conservation tools required for the item. The Department will not store items for other institutions that are not being used in research or exhibition for the Department.

C. Packing and Shipping

While packing items for shipment to another institution, certain specifications must be followed. Directions for packaging will be labeled and archived for each item in the collection. These directions must be followed and included in the receipt to the borrowing institution. The borrowing institution must be notified of the correct protocol for shipping the materials back at the end of the loan period. If these directions are not followed by the borrowing institution the next time they request an item approval may be denied for this reason.

The Department will request the lending institution to provide appropriate instructions for the shipment of their materials at the end of the loan period. The Department will strive to follow the protocol provided by the lending institution in order to secure professional respect and
goodwill. Any questions about packing and shipping should be forwarded to the Scientific Preparator and Collections Manager.

VI. Care and Control of Collection

A. Handling Procedures

The Department strives to handle the collection in the best possible manner to for preservation and conservation of the items. Conservation as the treatment of museum objects to stabilize them chemically or strengthen them physically, sustaining their survival as long as possible in their original form. Preservation as the activities associated with maintaining museum materials for use, either in their original physical form or some other format (Evans and Sapanaro 358).

1. The vertebrate material we are handling is incredibly delicate and prone to destruction by natural oils in human skin. Gloves must be used at all times when handling materials.

2. Curation entails the proper housing and labeling of the fossils as well as maintaining the association between the fossils and field data in regards to provenance. (Society of Vertebrate Paleontology).

3. Items should be stored and shelved in appropriately sized receptacles and should be secure in their placement so as to not be easily shifted from their designated place.

4. All staff and authorized visitors must be educated in proper handling procedures in order to be admitted access to the collection.

5. Climate control is paramount to the proper care of our collection. Items shall be stored with this in mind and correct climate settings will be determined by
approved experts. The climate should be chosen in accordance with the best conditions for the collection and not for the best conditions for those utilizing the collection.

6. Considerations must be made for the best protection against natural disasters, fire and smoke damage, water damage, insect infestation and other unfortunate occurrences (Evans and Sapanaro 363-4). Most of our specimens are housed in fireproof and secure metal cabinets. User-friendly compactors were installed to conserve space and allow easy access to specimens in the 1992 renovation funded by grants from the National Science Foundation (CMNH Web site).

B. Authorized Personnel and Security

Items not currently being displayed in exhibits will be placed in the proper storage facilities. Staff may access the storage areas for research materials, placement of objects back into the storage area, and to place new items in the facilities. Staff may not take personal visitors into the storage areas unless given express approval by the Scientific Preparator and Collections Manager. Approval may be denied for any reason the Collections Manager deems fit. The integrity and safety of the collection must always be kept in mind. If a staff member sees any individual in the storage area they do not recognize, it is their responsibility to question the individual and go through the necessary avenues to establish approval by the Collections Manager. Warrants for searches must be provided by law enforcement and other government personal for access to the collections where they will be briefed on proper handling procedures. Researchers and scholars may gain access to the collection via approval by the staff as committee and the Scientific Preparator and Collections Manager. Storage facilities and exhibits will be fitted with standard security and surveillance devices as approved by the Museum.
VII. Ultimate Uses of the Collection

A. Exhibition

As established by our founder, Andrew Carnegie over one hundred years ago, the primary purpose of our collection is to organize it into exhibitions for view by the general public. Exhibition fosters public interest in our vision, financial resources, and the growth of potential future enthusiasts and vertebrate paleontologists. It is also important that we exhibit our collection in order to participate in our field at a global level.

B. Education

It is our responsibility as purveyors of the paleontological field that we educate others of our subject area. Proper education in regards to the field includes handling procedures, excavation procedures, labeling and cataloguing, and record keeping for prosperity. If we educate the public on these principles, more items will survive for research and preservation in years to come. Public interest remains key in this element as well. The Museum allows group tours at a nominal rate and the Department will educate these groups as they appear and allow restricted access to items in the collection.

C. Research and Publications

We are members of the scientific community and as such it is required that we participate in research and publish our findings. This is for the good of the field and the entire scientific community. Research findings will be published in the Annals of Carnegie Museum, the Bulletin of Carnegie Museum of Natural History, and the Special Publications of Carnegie Museum. All issues of these publications will be archived in the Carnegie Natural History Library (CMNH Web site). Published articles will not just include new findings but also highlight the items in our
collection. Access will be provided for researchers and scholars not on staff under the approval of the Collections Manager with supervision by an authorized staff member.

D. Commercial Use

As aforementioned, Andrew Carnegie commissioned casts to be made and disseminated to other institutions in the beginning of our Department. In order to continue the free dissemination of the fossil record, the Department sells casts of published fossil specimens at a nominal cost and available to anyone. It is also understood that some objects may be of interest to parties for other commercial uses such as film, photography, and the like. Permission may be provided to use the collection in this manner with approval from the Scientific Preparator and Collections Manager and adherence to collection safety guidelines. The Museum must be credited by the interested parties in any media released to the public. Donations to the Museum and the Department for the use of the collection are encouraged and accepted.

VIII. Procedures for Review and Changes in Policy

This Collection Development Policy should be reviewed by the Director of the Museum, the Collections Manager of the Department, and the staff as committee on a yearly basis. A written collection development policy is useless unless it is consistently updated to reflect the growth and changes of the collection. During the review session, changes will be made to best reflect the collection as a whole. Changes to the policy can be made at any time if any of the aforementioned individuals or committee brings the issue to the attention of the Collections Manager and the Director of the Museum and it is approved in the same manner as done in the annual review session.
Bibliography of Resources Used and Consulted


* Combined knowledge from lecture notes, discussions, and class readings not necessarily cited due to overlap in content and reiteration in new format from memory.