



EDIT research loan policy for natural history collections

Introduction and aim

The following document was drafted by the EDIT WP3.1 Directors of Collections (DoC) group. It is based on the loan policies of 13 European natural history museums¹ participating within EDIT, prepared by a taskforce within the DoC², and the result of discussions held in two DoC workshops.

The document aims at a common loan policy for EDIT institutions that will facilitate access to specimens through loans whilst maximising their long term preservation. This is closely aligned with the EDIT aim to develop commonality of policy within an integrated taxonomic facility.

This policy covers the loan of both morphological specimens and molecular collections such as frozen tissue and DNA for scientific purposes. It does not cover living collections, libraries and archives, loans for exhibition or loans for commercial purposes.

Background

Loaning specimens or samples whether morphological or molecular has a number of clear benefits to both present and future users of collections:

- allows users to compare material
- adds value to collections through annotation
- avoids unnecessary travel

However movement of loans inevitably puts collections at risk. Policies are designed to minimise these risks while facilitating responsible access. These risks include:

- damage or loss through poor handling in post
- confiscation due to failure to comply with changing laws on material transfer etc
- damage due to irradiation etc on entry to country
- “professional competition” i.e. individuals borrowing material to prevent others using it
- damage or loss through lack of clear institutional responsibility

Inevitably through tradition and legal requirements, policies vary both between and within institutions and in some cases there are no policies. The Directors of Collections group agreed that there is an urgent need for a European loan policy which will:

- prevent the loss of and damage to collections
- guarantee transparency including traceability of specimens i.e. where are they, who is responsible for them, and what are they being used for
- ensure that collections on loan will be managed to the same quality standards and rules in all institutions
- encourage alternatives to loans where possible such as:
 - digital images, remote microscopy, etc
 - subsidized collection visit (e.g. through SYNTHESYS)
 - label information through databases

What follows is a proposal for a common loan policy for adoption initially by the EDIT consortium which will hopefully expand to an international standard. This core policy is derived from a more comprehensive loan policy which the DoC has developed as a model to assist institutions in developing their internal organizational policies.

¹ MNHN Paris, NHM London, Naturalis Leiden, ZMA Amsterdam, MfN Berlin, NBG Brussels, RBINS Brussels, RBG Kew, Botany Krakow, NHN Leiden, SMN Stuttgart, RMCA Tervuren, BGBM Berlin

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Action requested from EDIT BoD

The DoC requests that the BoD:

- accepts the principle of a common loan policy as laid out in this document and
- sends suggestions for improvements through their representatives on the DoC for this document to be finalised by the DoC taskforce and signed by the directors.

Berlin, Leiden, London, Paris

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EDIT Loan Policy Agreement

Loan requests

- only approved borrowers³ can borrow specimens
- loan requests must be submitted to a designated person as the lending institution defines
- loan requests should give as much information as possible e.g. registration numbers and synonymy

Where will material be sent to?

- specimens will only be sent to recognized (non-profit) scientific institutions with collections and staff responsible for their management (including universities, if they can comply with the conditions within this policy document)
- institutions must record and track all material entering as loans centrally or at least at department level through a single contact point
- only in exceptional circumstances will loans be made to individuals at private addresses, and then only under stringent additional terms and conditions
- forwarding of loans to third parties is not allowed without approval of the lending institution⁴

Material available for loan

- all specimens in the institution's collections are potentially available for research loan; exceptions can be made for type and figured specimens, extinct (recent) species and specimens of high historical significance
- in any circumstances the institution reserves the right to refuse to lend any material within its collection at its discretion
- only an agreed proportion of the institution's holdings of a collection unit, e.g. species or samples from one locality, would normally be sent on loan at any one time

Restrictions

- no changes to original labels are allowed
- no changes to specimens are allowed without permission (including pedestals/armatures, sheets, etc. to which the object is fixed)
- annotations by the borrower should not be permanently attached but provided in an accompanying letter, on loosely attached slips etc or in a database according to guidelines provided by the lending institution
- if an object is damaged, no repairs are allowed without consultation with the owning institution

Non-DNA destructive sampling e.g. dissections of insect genitalia, flowers etc

- non-DNA destructive sampling by the borrower is only allowed after approval by the lending institute
- unused fragments of specimens etc. are the property of the owner and must be returned in an appropriate capsule etc and clearly labelled
- if destructive sampling leads to other products (such as slides or geological objects) and the borrower is allowed to keep products, the institute of origin has the right to ask for duplicates

The loan term and loan extensions

- the maximum initial period for research loans is 12 months
- if approved for extension, the renewal period will be for 6 to 12 months with the possibility to extend twice; the maximum loan duration is therefore 3 years
- when applying for an extension after 12 months, the reason behind this extension has to be made clear in the application, including a scientific progress report on the work conducted so far and the work that still has to be done

Photos and copyright

- taking images is only allowed after written approval⁵ by the owning institution and only for scientific, non-commercial use

³ Approved borrowers must be bona fide researchers; in case of post-graduate students, post-doctoral researchers, emeritus and retired staff, honorary or adjunct staff etc request must be made through their supervisor, mentor, or responsible staff in charge, preferably a single person of position such as the head of collection management.

⁴ The approved borrower undertakes to ensure that the loaned items shall only be kept at their host institution unless specific permission has been granted by the appropriate department to allow the item to be moved to another locality.

- references to images must be added to the specimen, e.g. in separate letter or in a collection database according to guidelines provided by lending institution
- images will be available to the owning institution

Acknowledgements and feedback

- the borrower must use the correct name or acronym of the lending institute as indicated
- publications arising from research on specimens are to be sent to the loaning institution (preferably as pdf)

Costs

- the costs incurred by the lending institution in servicing outgoing loans are normally borne by this institution. If there are any significant additional costs for instance for special transport methods, it reserves the right to recover these costs but should inform the borrower of these before the loan is dispatched

Housing, security, environmental conditions, packaging & transport

- the institution in which the loan (or material associated with the loan e.g. documentation) is to be housed and used must in all respects be safe, secure and conform to the recommendations and requirements of the lending institution (see appendix for housing of molecular loans)
- where necessary specialised transportation in compliance with dangerous goods regulations i.e. IATA must be adhered to. Similarly, all CITES and import, export laws must be followed
- loans will only be sent to institutions who have specified the way the borrowed objects will be disinfected upon receipt. This report is needed only once and will be applicable to all future loans unless changes to disinfection are made. The protocol must be acceptable to the lending institution
- loans are to be returned preferably in the original packing
- confirmation has to be sent upon receipt as well as when the loan is to be sent back
- in exceptional circumstances e.g. fragile specimens, the institutes involved must agree on the means of transport, but it is the owner who decides. The lending institution can request to return the loan by an official carrier company, by registered mail or e.g. personal transport

Failure to comply with this policy or any terms & conditions imposed

- the loaning institution shall contact (in writing) the borrower and the borrowing institution (e.g. the head of the organisation they are employed by) and request that the situation is rectified immediately
- following the above, if the approved borrower still fails to comply with this written request, the lending institution shall be entitled to terminate the loan and recover the loaned items immediately
- if the lending Institution is forced to terminate the loan it may apply sanctions to future interactions with both the borrower and the borrowing institution

⁵ Approval to the borrower to make photographs is not same as transfer of copyright. Copyright must therefore be part of loan agreement. The photographer (if it is the borrower) has to be mentioned in case of publication of illustrations.

Molecular collections

Molecular collections (see appendix for definition) form a discrete group of collections not only in the technical expertise required to set them up, manage and develop them but also in their housing. Specific statements are included below that apply to these collections.

The owning institution will establish a 'Specialist Molecular Curator' or 'Molecular Advisory Panel' to:

- advise and confirm feasibility of success for the destructive sampling loan request for molecular work (as supported by evidence of past successes for the molecular processes intended on application form)
- assess specimen/sample status to minimize damage, over-use of sample and impartially prioritize loans in the case of multiple identical requests, especially from type, extinct or rare specimens, informing and inviting collaboration between all researchers involved
- review exceptional circumstances e.g. a request will reduce the original sample to zero quantities remaining
- suggest the use of institute of origin's on site facilities (molecular laboratories and sequencing facilities) for visiting staff and/or institute's own staff to perform the destructive molecular sampling if the specimen or sample is too precious, fragile, sensitive (rare/endangered, CITES etc) to send away

Authorisation and loan agreement for molecular work

- a signed compatibility check guarantee in writing is required for any molecular collections to ensure that appropriate matching storage conditions are used, for instance freezer or liquid nitrogen temperature and sample cryovial compatibility, humidity controlled cabinets for ambiently stored molecular samples (FTA, silica gel samples, lyophilised/freeze dried samples) must be taken into account

Obligations of the applicant for molecular loans

- the applicant must notify the relevant department of all publications arising from the destructive sampling of the specimens or samples and will be asked to provide copies including acknowledgement of institution of origin in all subsequent publications, GenBank numbers etc.
- all remaining samples from the original loan material for destructive sampling must be returned: DNA/RNA/protein/metabolite/lipid etc extractions, and if requested PCR products, sequencing reactions, with direct copies of sample data including sequence data

Acknowledgements and feedback for molecular collections and products

- in the case of DNA studies the institute of origin must be informed of any data sent to GenBank e.g. object accession number
- any data sent to GenBank should be linked to the original specimen and accession or similar unique identifier
- reporting the results to the owner is compulsory, also in case of negative (no) results

Transportation of molecular samples

- loan shipment must be accompanied by paperwork detailing declared known contaminants present in specimens or samples: pathogens (Zoonoses if known), DNAs, fungi, spores etc. plus supporting best practice documents for molecular work in the light of these contaminants
- specialised transportation should be used where necessary to ensure compliance with Dangerous Goods regulations i.e. IATA regulations for dry ice, ethanol and liquid nitrogen. Ambient temperature shipment should be used wherever possible (lyophilised samples or FTA cards for DNA/RNA)

Intellectual property rights/property rights for molecular collections

- the Intellectual Property Rights of 'samples' (e.g. original genomic DNA, RNA or protein extractions) lies with the institute of origin; hence forwarding any part of these to third parties will require prior permission from the lending institution
- whole genome amplifications (WGAs), PCR products, sequencing reactions and sequence data) are 'copies' and as such the IPR lies with the borrowing institute where they were generated, from where they can be forwarded to third parties at their own discretion

Warranties for molecular loans

- the lending institute is not liable for failures in any molecular analysis (DNA extraction, PCR product, sequencing reaction, etc), unless this arises out of negligence on the part of the institution or from any failure by the institution to use due skill and care

Note

There are a number of complex issues associated with IPR and some molecular samples and copies e.g genetic libraries. The working group is researching this further and additional policy statements will be added at a later date.

Obligations of the applicant

- if samples are sent to the applicant, the institution's Research Loans Policy and any associated loan terms and conditions apply. The applicant will sign and return a receipt to acknowledge the arrival of the material and agree to the terms and conditions.
- the applicant should, where possible, return to the relevant department all remaining items and products. If it is not possible to return these items the applicant must inform the lending institution of the reason.

APPENDIX 1 Molecular collections

Definition

Molecular collections/samples are intended specifically for molecular research

This includes:

Samples/Specimens

- deep-frozen specimens or tissues in liquid nitrogen (-196°C)
- frozen tissues in freezers (-80°C)
- alcohol-preserved specimens specifically collected for molecular work or tissues (-20, +4, +16°C)
- silica-dried material (RT)
- lyophilised/freeze-dried material (RT)
- samples on FTA cards (RT)
- viable cell lines cultured from fresh tissues (cryo banks).

Products

- extracted genomic/mitochondrial/chloroplast DNA in water or buffers (-20°C)
- extracted RNA (-80 °C)
- genomic / expression (cDNA) phage / BAC libraries in bacterial culture (-80°C)
- expression (cDNA) and genomic libraries on FTA cards (RT)
- DNA Sequencing reactions
- PCR products
- protein and amino acids
- Mixed Environmental Genomic DNA / RNA / protein and amino acid survey samples
- historical contaminant sample series
- lipid and metabolite sample series.
- returned material from all destructive sampling loans.
- unforeseen future analyses