

Visitor Information and Procedures

**Division of Birds: Department of Vertebrate Zoology: National Museum of Natural History:
Smithsonian Institution**

Contact:

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The Division of Birds' vast collections of research specimens and library are used by scientists, graduate students and others from around the world. On average we host between 200 and 400 visitors annually. The collection is primarily used for basic research on birds. The collection and library are not open to the general public for tours, general browsing, artistic ventures or other activities that might disrupt the scientific users.

All visitors are requested to arrange visits in advance by filling out our [Visitor Request Form](#).

The Division of Birds is open 8 a.m. – 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday. Requests to work outside those core hours will be made on a case by case basis and may not be possible. The collection is not staffed and thus not open on weekends or federal holidays. Long term visitors can discuss the possibility for after hours and weekend access with the collections staff.

Visitors are reminded that parking is not possible at the museum, and you must use public parking. There are a number of commercial parking garages within 5 blocks of the museum. You are encouraged to use public transportation whenever possible. The Metro subway stops at Smithsonian, Archives, and Federal Triangle are within easy walking distance to the Natural History Museum.

Visitors should arrive at the 10th and Constitution Avenue entrance. Arrival time should be arranged in advance with the Collections Manager. A staff member will meet you at the museum entrance and escort you to the collections.

Use of Collection Guidelines:

- ♦ All visitors will receive a behind the scenes pass from the Security Office to access to the non-public areas of the building.
- ♦ Only approved specimens, species, groups, etc may be used during your visit. If you need to look at additional groups of specimens, please ask collections staff for permission before browsing the collections.
- ♦ Handle study specimens with care. Please use paper trays or drawers to transport specimens to the work area. Return specimens to their original location after use.

- ◆ No drinking, smoking or eating is permitted in the research collections. Smoking is not permitted anywhere within the museum.
- ◆ Specimens may not be altered in any way without prior permission. Dissections, removal of feathers, skin samples or removing ecto-parasites are not permitted without an approved destructive sampling request.
- ◆ Notations on specimen, case or drawer labels is forbidden without prior permission.
- ◆ Do not leave specimens out after use or overnight. Close cases immediately when not in use.
- ◆ Specimens removed from collection for study for more than two days must have a removal 'blue' slip prepared and placed in the collection.
- ◆ Please be advised that most of our study skins were treated with arsenic trioxide, may contain lead, or have other hazardous materials present. Gloves are available for your use.
- ◆ Please turn off lights over work tables and in the aisles when you are not using them.
- ◆ Access to types and specimens of certain rare species is restricted. Please ask the collections management staff for assistance if you need to look at this material.
- ◆ Requests for hand-carried loans usually must be made in advance as the curatorial committee must review your written request
- ◆ For publication purposes, the correct museum acronym for the National Museum of Natural History is "USNM", regardless of the label heading. We request a reprint or PDF file for all publications resulting from use of our specimens.
- ◆ Please bring misidentifications or damaged specimens and labels to our attention.

All specimens have a digital record on our database. You can access the database and download specimens lists at any time. <https://collections.nmnh.si.edu/search/birds/>

Do not leave cameras, purses, or wallets unattended in a work area, even for a short time. You can ask a collections staff member for assistance and conceal them in a nearby closet or case.

Off-Site Collections

The bulk of our collections are housed at the main NMNH museum located at 10th and Constitution, NW. However, a portion of the collection including some skins as well as all nests, eggs, and fluid preserved specimens have been moved to our Museum Support Center in suburban Maryland. The museum provides a regular shuttle bus to and from the Museum Support Center.

Visitors wishing to examine specimens at the Museum Support Center must make arrangements with our staff prior to your visit, as a staff member must accompany you in order to sign you in and provide access to the collections.

Visitors should also plan extra time for their visit to accommodate travel time to and from this facility. The Museum Support Center maintains strict inventory control over specimen movement in and out of the building through its shipping office. Visitors planning to bring comparative material into the MSC facility must let the Collections Management Staff know in advance.