

14 June 2021

**Subject:** Amber specimens acquired from Myanmar following military coup

Dear paleontological community,

We are writing to you today to promote awareness regarding the ongoing issue in Myanmar and its wider impact, including scientific research<sup>1</sup>. We represent the [Society of Vertebrate Paleontology \(SVP\)](http://www.vertpaleo.org), a non-profit global scientific organization with over 2,000 researchers, educators, students, and enthusiasts, whose aim is to advance the science of vertebrate paleontology and to support and encourage the discovery, preservation, and protection of vertebrate fossils, fossil sites, and their geological and paleontological contexts. Here, we wish to emphasize three main points:

1. The situation in Myanmar has deteriorated significantly, following the 1 February 2021 military coup.
2. Due to the coup, SVP suggests a hard moratorium on the publication of all fossil specimens in amber obtained from sources in Myanmar after January 2021.
3. SVP is reviewing its previous moratorium on publication of amber specimens acquired after June 2017 and is in the process of updating its guidelines.

Since our letter dated 21 April 2020 on the subject of fossils from conflict zones and reproducibility of paleontological data<sup>2</sup>, there have been further troubling developments within Myanmar. On 1 February 2021, the Tatmadaw (the armed forces of Myanmar) seized political control over the country during a military coup<sup>3</sup>, declaring a year-long state of emergency. As of mid-April 2021, more than 700 people have been killed in Myanmar as a result of this coup<sup>4</sup>. Following the takeover of the amber mines in June 2017, the Tatmadaw has repeatedly instigated armed conflict and ethnic strife in the country, which has been condemned by the United Nations as a genocidal crime against humanity<sup>3</sup>. Due to a lack of outside scrutiny, there have been reports that the Tatmadaw is acting with even greater impunity in the Kachin State, a region mostly beyond the reach of international media, but where most of the gemstone and amber mines are located<sup>5</sup>. The gemstone industry, which includes selling and trading amber specimens that contain fossils, has been a key source of funding for the Tatmadaw<sup>6</sup> and brings a substantial amount of revenue<sup>7</sup>. The takeover of the amber mines in 2017 quickly affected the operations of artisanal and small-scale miners and traders dependent on amber mining<sup>8,9</sup>, and these individuals will likely be further marginalized after the 2021 coup.

Considering these events, SVP urges its members and other professional and avocational paleontologists to engage in due diligence with respect to amber material originating from Myanmar to ensure that these specimens have no links to the Tatmadaw and the ongoing humanitarian crisis in the country. Journal editors, publishers, and peer referees can also help to set high ethical standards and follow best practices in the paleontological community by refraining from publishing manuscripts on Myanmar amber acquired after the 2021 coup and ensuring that fossil-bearing amber specimens have no ties to the military-owned conglomerates [Myanmar Economic Corporation \(MEC\)](http://www.mec.com.mm) and [Myanmar Economic Holdings Ltd \(MEHL\)](http://www.mehl.com.mm).

Our 21 April 2020 letter<sup>2</sup> sent to the editors of various scientific journals requested a moratorium on the publication of fossil specimens in amber from Myanmar after June 2017, when the Tatmadaw began its campaign to seize control of Myanmar amber mines. Although the decision to publish was ultimately left to the judgement of editors and publishers, several of whom actively adopted or followed the editorial policy of SVP's *Journal of Vertebrate Paleontology*<sup>10,11</sup>, some have criticized SVP's position without offering any alternative solutions to curb the paleontological community's contribution to the humanitarian crisis in Myanmar<sup>12-14</sup>. SVP acknowledges that its position does not represent that of the entire paleontological community, but the society remains actively concerned about the ongoing situation in Myanmar.

SVP has now established a Myanmar Working Group that is currently developing best practice guidelines for publications on all fossil-bearing amber specimens from Myanmar and reviewing the 2017 moratorium, among other matters. Because of the 2021 military coup in the country, it is now SVP's view, based on the Myanmar Working Group's recommendation, that a continued moratorium is still warranted on the publication of fossil specimens in amber obtained from sources in Myanmar after January 2021. As much as this is discouraging from a scientific standpoint, it is one readily actionable solution for us—the paleontological community—towards reducing our contribution to the ongoing humanitarian crisis<sup>15</sup>. With regards to recent amber material acquired prior to 2021, the Myanmar Working Group has established [initial guidelines](#). Common guidelines for other situations, such as museum collections, are currently being developed and will be available on the SVP website, where they will be continuously updated in response to the changing situation in Myanmar. Furthermore, SVP has shared an additional document entitled [“Further Information on Myanmar Amber, Mining, Human Rights Violations, and Amber Trade”](#).

In summary, SVP's hope is that the entire paleontological community will work collaboratively to take any and all actions that might mitigate the violence and human rights abuses in Myanmar. While SVP promotes scientific advancement, SVP does not condone scientific progress over human welfare, intentionally or unintentionally. Although not all paleontologists may agree with SVP's stance, our intention is to respond proactively to a fluid situation in Myanmar by highlighting the complex economic, ethical, and humanitarian issues related to fossils in Myanmar amber to the greater scientific community. We would be delighted if you could join our effort, regardless of your specific interests within paleontology. This letter has been sent to various paleontological societies and other relevant natural history groups listed below. Please forward this letter to your peers or anyone that we may have missed to promote awareness of the ongoing ethical and humanitarian issues concerning Myanmar amber. Comments and questions concerning our letter can be addressed to any one of us, Nussaibah Raja or Chris Beard (Co-chairs of SVP's Myanmar Working Group), or Kenshu Shimada (Chair of SVP's Government Affairs Committee) at [svp@vertpaleo.org](mailto:svp@vertpaleo.org).

Sincerely yours,



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*SVP President*



Margaret E. Lewis, Ph.D.

*SVP Vice President*



Emily J. Rayfield, Ph.D.

*Past SVP President*

**This letter was sent to:**

Alabama Paleontological Society  
Alberta Palaeontological Society  
Anza-Borrego Desert State Park Paleontology Society  
Asociación Chilena de Paleontología  
Asociación Paleontológica Argentina  
Association of Applied Paleontological Sciences  
Association of Materials and Methods in Paleontology  
Big Bone Lick State Historic Site  
Birmingham Paleontological Society  
Buffalo Geological Society  
Calvert Marine Museum Fossil Club  
Canadian Society of Vertebrate Paleontology  
Cleveland Geological Society  
Club Paleontológico Boliviano “FossilBol”  
Colorado Springs Mineralogical Society, Fossil Study Group  
Columbus Rock and Mineral Society  
Dallas Paleontological Society  
Delaware Valley Paleontological Society  
Dry Dredgers  
European Association of Vertebrate Palaeontologists  
Falls of the Ohio State Park  
Fossil Research Society of Japan  
Institute of Vertebrate Paleontology and Paleoanthropology, Chinese Academy of Sciences  
International Amber Association  
International Palaeontological Society  
International Palaeontological Association  
Kentucky Paleontological Society  
Kentucky Paleontological Society  
Lincoln Orbit Earth Science Society  
Manasota Fossil Club  
Maryland Geological Society  
Memphis Archaeological and Geological Society  
Mid-American Paleontology Society  
Montana Dinosaur Trail  
myFossil  
Natural Science Collections Association  
New Mexico Friends of Paleontology  
North America Research Group  
North Carolina Fossil Club  
North Coast Fossil Club  
Northwest Paleontological Association  
Österreichische Paläontologische Gesellschaft  
Palaeontological Association  
Palaeontological Society of China  
Palaeontological Society of China  
Palaeontological Society of Japan  
Paläontologische Gesellschaft (German Palaeontological Association)  
Paleontological Society (US)  
Paleontological Society of Austin  
Paleontological Society of South Carolina  
Protectors of Tule Springs  
Rochester Academy of Science Fossil Section  
Sociedad Española de Paleontología  
Sociedad Mexicana de Paleontología  
Sociedade Brasileira de Paleontologia  
Society of the Preservation of Natural History Collections  
Society of Vertebrate Paleontology of China  
Southern California Paleontological Society  
Southwest Florida Fossil Society  
Southwest Paleontological Society  
Special Friends of the Aurora Fossil Museum  
Tampa Bay Fossil Club  
The Dinosaur Research Institute (DRI)  
Utah Friends of Paleontology  
West Virginia Fossil Club  
Western Interior Paleontological Society

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