



Society of Vertebrate Paleontology

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Myanmar Amber: Guidelines for the Peer Review Process

There is general agreement among the paleontological research community that illicit trade in fossil material must be resisted and that high ethical standards should be set for fossils entering the scientific literature. This document contains guidelines for all authors, editors, and reviewers involved in the peer review process, with the aim of ensuring that research on fossil material in amber from Myanmar (Burma) is carried out legally and ethically. These recommended guidelines, produced by SVP's Myanmar Working Group, particularly apply to fossil material in amber from Myanmar (hereafter referred to as the 'material'), but can be applied or adapted more broadly to any fossil material, especially those originating in resource-poor regions or regions where armed conflict is occurring.

These guidelines are informed by and comply with the following national and international standards and conventions:

- [European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity \(ALLEA, 2017\)](#)
- [Global Code of Conduct for Research in Resource-Poor Settings \(TRUST, 2018\)](#)
- [UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership Cultural Property \(1970\)](#)
- [UNIDROIT Convention on Stolen and Illicitly Exported Cultural Objects \(1995\)](#)
- [International Council of Museums Code of Ethics for Natural History Museums \(2014\)](#)
- [Museum Association Code of Ethics for Museums \(2015\)](#)
- [Combating Illicit Trade: Due Diligence Guidelines for Museums, Libraries and Archives on collecting and borrowing of Cultural Material \(DCMS, 2005\)](#)
- [SPECTRUM 5.0 \(Collections Trust, 2017\)](#)

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Guidelines

1. For authors

When preparing and submitting manuscripts detailing research on the material, authors are responsible for the following:

1. Providing information in the cover letter as well as in the manuscript (or in the supplementary materials) regarding the provenance history of the material(s). This includes detailing how access to the material was obtained.
 - If collected in person, did the authors apply for a collection permit, and if the material was not in the same country as it was excavated, did the authors apply for an export and import permit? If ‘no’ is the answer to either or both questions, is there a reason why this was not done? For example, was there no legal requirement for such permits in that specific country?
 - If accessed from a museum collection, has an official permanent catalogue number(s) for the material been listed?
 - Are there gaps in the history of ownership due to armed conflict or political unrest? Have they been stated in the manuscript?
2. Providing information regarding where the material is repositied.
 - If the material is in a repository in a country other than the country of origin, is this in compliance with the relevant laws and regulations?
 - If accessed through a collection not under public trust, can the material be accessed by other researchers that meet typical repository or collection requirements for access to material of this type?
3. If applicable, archiving the CT-scan, raw or processed digital data in an online repository with a DOI or as supplementary data.

The authors are also recommended to work together with any researchers from the country of origin of the fossil material in line with the Global Code of Conduct for Research in Resource-Poor Settings (TRUST, 2018).

To satisfactorily provide evidence for the legal and ethical status of material, the information provided should document the following:

- I. That the material was acquired legally and ethically as described in this guidance and in the [SVP correspondence on Myanmar amber](#);
- II. That the material was exported and imported (if applicable) legally and ethically;
- III. That the material is legally repositied in a repository under public trust;
- IV. That the material is permanently accessible to other researchers that meet typical repository or collection requirements for access to material of this type; and
- V. That proof of current and previous ownership of the material has been provided.

2. For editors

Before considering the publication of a manuscript(s) describing the material, editors should consider the following in relation to the options provided by their journal:

1. Does your editorial policy and author guidelines cover topics like provenance history, such as asking for the required permits? If not, please consider updating this documentation in line with other paleontological journals.
2. Do you provide a structured option for authors to self-declare information regarding the legal acquisition of fossil material, and any related ethical considerations?
3. Do you request specific documents from authors to support their declaration, such as collection permit, export permit, museum catalogue entry, and affidavits from any involved private collector?
4. Do you require authors to declare whether their material is held in a repository under public trust or provide justification for restricted access?
5. If the publication is the original description of a new taxon or previously unpublished material of a known taxon, did the authors work together with any researchers from the country of origin of the fossil material in line with the Global Code of Conduct for Research in Resource-Poor Settings ([TRUST, 2018](#))?

3. For reviewers

When reviewing a manuscript describing material in amber from Myanmar, peer reviewers (and editors) should consider the following:

1. Did the authors provide information, e.g. in the cover letter or as a separate file, as recommended in the [SVP guidelines](#) regarding the provenance history of the material they are describing?
2. Do the authors provide information on appropriate government permits for fieldwork, collecting and/or export? Are these documents supplied as supplementary files for viewing with the publication?
3. If the material is repositied in a different country from its country of origin, is there a specific reason for the material to be housed in a foreign repository?
4. Is the fossil material held in a repository under public trust? If not, why?
5. If the publication is the original description of a new taxon (or previously unpublished material of a known taxon), did the authors work together with any researchers from the country of origin in line with the Global Code of Conduct for Research in Resource-Poor Settings ([TRUST, 2018](#))?
6. Do you have any reason to believe that the material was illegally or unethically acquired?

‘Red flag’ categories for Myanmar amber

The following “red flags” are useful for detecting any problematic fossil material and relate to political activity occurring within Myanmar. Fossil material acquired under these categories cannot reasonably be considered legal or wholly ethical, and should be carefully inspected by the editorial team.

- A. Fossil material in Myanmar amber that was acquired after February 2021;
- B. Fossil material in Myanmar amber that was exported from the country since 1970 but without any associated documentation detailing provenance or export; or
- C. Fossil material in Myanmar amber that was exported after June 2017 without a collection permit, export permit or gem production license provided.

Glossary of terms

Catalogue (catalog) number: A unique number assigned to material within a museum collection. This number should be unique, permanent, and associated with a single museum repository. Number formats may vary across institutions and material types. These numbers should indicate that fossil material is permanently accessioned into a museum collection.

Collection permit: A legal document issued by a relevant authority that allows the collection of fossil material from the field. Depending upon local laws and regulations, permits may or may not be required.

Export permit: A legal document issued by a relevant authority that allows the removal of fossil material from their state or country of origin. Depending upon local laws and regulations, export permits may or may not be required.

Import permit: A legal document issued by a relevant authority that allows the entry of fossil material into a state or country. Depending upon local laws and regulations, import permits may or may not be required. In some cases, a postal receipt may be provided as proof.

Provenance history: The history of collection, sale, and ownership of fossil material from its original discovery and/or excavation.

Scientific repository / Museum repository: A facility under public trust that provides for long-term care, conservation, and access to fossil material. These include, but are not limited to, regional and national museums, university collections, and non-profit research centers.

Online repository: A web-based platform for long-term archival access to electronic files and digital data online.