

Collecting Permits in Mexico and the National Zoological Collections

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ABSTRACT.—The goal of this talk is to convey the information that (1) a collecting permit issued by the Mexican government requires that a small fraction of the total number of zoological specimens collected during the field work be given back to the government, and (2) this fraction is deposited in the National Zoological Collections of the Instituto de Biología, at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. These collections are among the oldest, largest and most important of the country. The specimens derived from collecting permits become part of the Collections, and are catalogued, curated and made available for study to any interested scientist. In addition, staff at the Collections and the Mexican government promote and assist scientists in the procedures for loans and exchange of specimens at domestic and international levels. They ensure the museum specimens remain available for research and education.

RESUMEN.—El propósito de esta presentación es informar que (1) los permisos de colector expedidos por el gobierno de México requieren que una pequeña fracción del número total de ejemplares colectados durante trabajos de campo sean devueltos al gobierno, y (2) que tal fracción debe ser depositada en las Colecciones Zoológicas Nacionales del Instituto de Biología de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. Estas colecciones se cuentan entre las más antiguas, grandes y más importantes del país. Los ejemplares derivados de los permisos de colector se convierten en parte de esas colecciones, son catalogados, ordenados y puestos a disposición de cualquier científico interesado para su estudio. Además, las Colecciones Zoológicas Nacionales y el gobierno mexicano orientan y auxilian a los científicos en los procedimientos para préstamos e intercambio de ejemplares a nivel nacional e internacional. Las autoridades mexicanas y las universitarias trabajan para que los ejemplares de museo permanezcan disponibles para investigación y educación.

INTRODUCTION

The National Zoological Collections (NZC) of the National University of Mexico play an important role in preserving museum specimens obtained from collecting permits issued by the Mexican government. This role, however, is little known and understood. Should more scientists become aware of this fact, the likelihood increases that more and better museum specimens will be deposited in the NZC. Therefore, the aim of this communication is to report on and describe the relationships between the collecting permits issued by the Mexican government and the NZC.

THE NATIONAL ZOOLOGICAL COLLECTIONS

The NZC are housed in the Instituto de Biología, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), in Mexico City, México. Their holdings include representatives of invertebrates and vertebrates. These collections are the oldest, largest and most important scientific holdings of fauna in México (Lot H. 1995). The main objectives of the NZC are to carry out (1) the inventory of the Mexican fauna, and (2) research on the systematics, evolution, biogeography, and conservation of selected taxonomic groups of Mexican fauna.

The NZC maintain high standards of curation (Cervantes 1993). Most curators and staff of the NZC are active faculty at the Ph.D. level. They conduct research in the field and in the laboratory, and the majority serve on tutorial committees of graduate students. With respect to the collection holdings, once the conventional procedures of curation are finished, the information concerning most catalogued specimens is stored in database files. Daily curatorial activities involve loans and exchanges of specimens at domestic and international levels, showing the extent of the use of these collections. In addition, information requests concerning the holdings are commonly received and answered by electronic mail. More information on the NZC is available at the home page of Instituto de Biología, UNAM (<http://www.ibiologia.unam.mx>).

THE NATIONAL ZOOLOGICAL COLLECTIONS AND SEMARNAP

There are close ties between the NZC and the environmental branch of the Mexican government, Secretaria de Medio Ambiente, Recursos Naturales y Pesca (SEMARNAP). On one hand, the faculty and staff of the NZC are advisers of SEMARNAP in matters of environmental policy. On the other hand, the Mexican government has determined that the NZC are the official depositories of the government for museum specimens of the Mexican fauna. This is why one of the regulations for collecting permits is the deposition of a small fraction of the collected material in a National Zoological Collection. Furthermore, another related regulation states that the curator of the relevant collection must issue a formal statement addressed to SEMARNAP certifying that the collecting-permit user deposited museum specimens in the National Zoological Collection. The specimens derived from collecting permits, consequently, become part of the National Zoological Collections, which means as well that the specimens are federal property.

The curators and staff make sure that museum specimens derived from collecting permits and deposited in the NZC are available for examination and study to any interested scientist upon request. Permit users may be sure they will have access to the holdings and the associated information at any time. In addition, specimens are kept under the same conditions of safety and care as for any other specimen in the NZC. Similarly, loans and exchanges of specimens commonly include specimens received from permit users. In summary, the NZC guarantee the preservation of their holdings and make them available for scientific purposes.

The consequences of these procedures regarding museum specimens derived from permits are of mutual benefit to the scientists, the Mexican government, and the NZC. These conditions have applied for both domestic and foreign collectors and have proved to be practical to implement.

IN THE PAST

However, such a mutually beneficial arrangement has not always worked out the same way. In the past, some constraints limited the collaboration between the Mexican government and the NZC. At times, the office work at the Mexican government was slow, or the NZC did not have staff or facilities adequate for curatorial procedures. In addition, scientists did not apply for permits. They either did not have information available to apply for collecting permits, or they just did not want to apply. Even if a scientist collected under a permit, the collectors did not deposit specimens in Mexican collections. Sometimes if a collector did comply with the regulations, the specimens deposited were of poor scientific value. Of course, type material was not turned into the NZC. On the other hand, it was common to learn that specimens returned to the Mexican government became lost or damaged in federal buildings. In other instances, specimens were just sent back directly to a government office, and no contact was made with curators and staff of the respective National Zoological Collection.

AT PRESENT

Fortunately, at present, the joint efforts between the NZC and the Mexican government have improved the preservation of specimens and access to them. The Mexican government has improved its paper system and promoted new and better regulations. The staff of the National Zoological Collections curate the specimens well and ensure their preservation (Cervantes 1993). The staff and facilities of the NZC facilitate access to museum specimens and the information associated with them.

Numerous type specimens are now part of the holdings of the NZC. The NZC report to the Mexican government when a permit user complies with the regulations has produced a good feedback system to benefit the collector, the NZC, and the Mexican fauna. Productive discussions and exchanges of ideas take place between permit users and faculty and staff of the NZC. One good consequence is that collections staff and permit users can freely make arrangements directly for the

procedures to deposit specimens. Similar conditions apply for procedures involving loans and exchanges of specimens. The quality and quantity of the holdings of the NZC and those of important scientific collections in the United States and Europe have increased due to the transportation and mutually beneficial exchanges of specimens.

CONCLUSIONS

The National Zoological Collections communicate successfully with the Mexican government regarding collecting permits of fauna.

The National Zoological Collections guarantee the preservation of the specimens derived from collecting permits, including type material.

Museum specimens are available to any interested scientist upon request.

The National Zoological Collections may be reached by both electronic mail and a home page on the Internet.

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