



A CODE OF CONDUCT for SCIENTIFIC COLLECTIONS

Conservation requires the collection of accurate scientific information that will advance understanding of marine species and their role in the ecosystem. This understanding is based in part on the collection of critical taxonomic and population dynamics information that informs our understanding of ecosystem health and evolutionary processes. Scientists who collect these types of information are committed to having minimal impacts on the species and its ecosystem. The purpose of this Code of Conduct of Scientific Collections (Code) is to clearly identify the practices and procedures that will guide scientists in their collection efforts.

The Code recognizes that accurate identification of species is essential and often requires the examination of dead specimens. Genetic connectivity and biogeographical analyses also require sampling in such numbers that careful evaluation of costs/benefits to the natural resources must be made. However, available evidence indicates that many vertebrate, invertebrate, and algal populations are not generally harmed by careful scientific collection of specimens. Nevertheless, localized populations and/or those that have been seriously impacted by habitat loss and fragmentation could potentially be harmed. Thus, the U.S. National Committee of the Census of Marine Life (CoML) believes that collecting should always be limited to the minimum necessary for the scientific purpose intended and done in full compliance with legal requirements relating to particular sites and species. This principle is maintained in the following Code, with guidance on the safeguarding of collections and associated data.

The Committee acknowledges that lethal sampling is a common necessity in order to advance conservation and wildlife management goals. We commend and promote the restraint that is already exercised by most scientists who study marine organisms. Furthermore, this committee maintains that, by subscribing to this Code, scientists demonstrate that they are concerned and committed marine biologists who wish to maximize the value of their data for scientific, public information and conservation. This Code is not meant to supercede any requirements of current animal care and use guidelines for institutions and agencies.

Respectfully,

The United States National Committee
CoML.US/?anchor=coml_us_code

For more information on this Code or the U.S. CoML program, please contact Michael Feldman, U.S. CoML Program Coordinator at mfeldman@OceanLeadership.org.

1.0 General Principles

The U.S. National Committee of CoML recommends that all organizations and individuals undertaking CoML research activities adopt this Code of Conduct for Scientific Collections. Its operating guidelines are based on the following principles:

1. Ascertain and comply with international, national and sub-national laws and policies.
2. Minimize or eliminate adverse environmental impacts through all stages of research activities.
3. Minimize or eliminate actual or potential conflicts or interference with existing or planned marine science research activities.
4. Maximize the benefit that can be derived from collected specimens.
5. Involve local scientists in research activities when possible to foster the development of scientific knowledge and research capacity within the host country.
6. Keep the local community engaged; respect the traditional culture of the region as part of the COML commitment.

2.0 Collecting - General

1. Capture only those specimens strictly required for a specific research purpose. Recognize that even an apparently common species may be locally vulnerable.
2. Examine live specimens and, whenever possible, release them near the place of capture.
3. Avoid removal of readily identified species from the wild, unless they are strictly required as voucher specimens for scientific or educational purposes.
4. Whenever possible, high resolution photography or videography should be considered as an alternative to collecting.
5. Rare species and locally uncommon varieties should not be taken repeatedly from the same locality.
6. Specimens should not be collected for exchange or disposal to other scientists without prior arrangements that comply with this code.
7. Scientists will not collect marine organisms from the wild for commercial purposes, including the manufacture of jewelry, art or ornamental display.
8. Maintain data on specimens from captive-bred stock or from old collections, including details of provenance.
9. Commit to protect and avoid damage to the habitat.
10. Keep adequate records, as indicated in article 8.1.
11. Properly curate and house research collections to maximize scientific value and prevent deterioration or damage by pests.
12. Safeguard the future value of research collections. For collections made with COML funding, identify the museum, learned society, or university that will care for and curate the collection.

3.0 Collecting - Permissions and Conditions

1. Obtain appropriate permit(s) for access and/or collecting on any site controlled by the appropriate legal authority.
2. Always comply with any conditions laid down by those responsible for granting access and the permission to collect. Activities not explicitly allowed in permits are forbidden.

3. Report your findings to the community or person(s) who provided permission. The local community should receive findings from marine protected areas, marine reserves and other important sites to the appropriate authority, including lists of the species recorded, annotated with habitat data.

4.0 Collecting – Protecting the Environment

1. Commit to the basic principle for research in the marine environment that the design of the study should provide for protection of the habitat. Markers and tags used in the study should be removed after the study.
2. Record the location of semi-permanent placement of instruments and markers and provide plans for the safe removal of these markers/instruments in the research design.
3. Do not anchor vessels in vulnerable benthic environments such as coral reefs.

5.0 Collecting - Rare, Local and Endangered Species

1. Taxa listed as being of 'Conservation Concern' should not be collected except with the utmost restraint. If justified for study, obtain license from the relevant authority to collect the listed species. (Please refer to the IUCN list of threatened species and other listings.)
2. Research on endangered species should have direct benefits to conservation. Endangered species should not be used to forward research goals that can be accomplished with other species.
3. If it can be reasonably expected to have no damaging effects on a population of listed species, provide justification for taking of larger or annually-repeated samples for scientific study.
4. Do not repetitively sample species in any locality where they are low in abundance.
5. Report newly discovered localities of rare species to the appropriate conservation organizations, records centers and organizers of recording schemes.

6.0 Collecting - Trapping

1. Release catch in traps after examination, except for specimens that must be killed for voucher purposes or required for scientific study. The release should be made in the same locality, but away from the immediate trap site.
2. Return unwanted by-catch organisms to the environment at the same locality.
3. Re-site traps used for scientific purposes if found to be catching rare or local species.

7.0 Data Preservation

1. Keep records of full and relevant data with all retained specimens; include attached data labels for all preserved samples. These data may be repeated and amplified in databases, notebooks and other media.
2. Lodge species lists, together with any other data with the relevant local, regional and national recording schemes. Whenever possible, enter the data in the Ocean Biogeographic Information System (OBIS) or another database readily accessible to the local community and the scientific community.