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The Scottish Fossil Code

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Abstract

After two years of preparation, involving a public consultation, the Scottish Fossil Code was launched by Michael Russell the Scottish Government Environment Minister in Cromarty on April 11th 2008. Probably the first national code of its kind, the Scottish Fossil Code aims primarily to help conserve the fossil heritage of Scotland.



Scotland has a remarkably rich geodiversity that spans nearly 3 billion years of Earth's history. Part of this 'Earth heritage' is the record of the development and evolution of life on Earth in the form of fossils. The fossil heritage exists in the natural environment, and importantly is also preserved in museums and private collections. It comprises an irreplaceable and finite resource that has uses in science, education and recreation. This element of Scotland's Earth heritage is vulnerable to abuse and damage and so requires a degree of safeguard and management to ensure its survival for future generations.

The Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 included provision for Scottish Natural Heritage to prepare the Scottish Fossil Code. The Code, produced with assistance from palaeontological researchers, land managers, collectors and others with an interest in Scotland's fossil heritage, provides advice on best practice in the collection, identification, conservation and storage of fossil specimens found in Scotland. The Code aims to enhance public interest in the fossil heritage of Scotland and promote responsible use of this resource for scientific, educational and recreational purposes.

Fossil collecting is an essential activity that provides the basic material and data for the science of palaeontology. It is hoped that following the Code will increase the personal interest and satisfaction that can be gained from forming a fossil collection; result in new finds to add to our record of past life and environments on planet Earth; and help conserve the fossil heritage of Scotland.

The essentials of the Scottish Fossil Code:

- **Seek permission** - *You are acting within the law if you obtain permission to extract, collect and retain fossils.*
- **Access responsibly** - *Consult the Scottish Outdoor Access Code prior to accessing land. Be aware that there are restrictions on access and collecting at some locations protected by statute.*
- **Collect responsibly** - *Exercise restraint in the amount collected and the equipment used. Be careful not to damage fossils and the fossil resource. Record details of both the location and the rocks from which fossils are collected.*
- **Seek advice** - *If you find an exceptional or unusual fossil do not try to extract it; but seek advice from an expert. Also seek help to identify fossils or dispose of an old collection.*
- **Label and look after** - *Collected specimens should be labelled and taken good care of.*
- **Donate** - *If you are considering donating a fossil or collection choose an Accredited museum, or one local to the collection area.*

The Code may be viewed and downloaded from www.snh.org.uk/fossilcode. Alternatively to receive a paper copy contact:

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A specimen of *Diplacanthus crassisimus* found at Hugh Miller's collecting locality in Cromarty, one of the specimens used in a workshop for pupils from Cromarty Primary School on the subject of fossils held on the occasion on the launch of the Scottish Fossil Code.