



WILDLIFE ETHICS COMMITTEE

Collection of hair and feather samples policy

Hair samples can be used for species identification, through individual hair characteristics observable under a microscope. Hair and feather samples which include the uncontaminated base of the hair/feather can yield DNA suitable for analysis.

Hair tubes and hair funnels

Hair tubes are short sections of PVC pipe lined with pieces of double-sided sticky-tape. Bait may be placed into a fixed, internal section to act as an attractant. Hair tubes are fixed to the ground, or onto a log or tree, and left undisturbed for a period of time (usually a number of weeks). Any mammals entering or partially entering the tube are likely to leave hairs stuck to the tape. Hair tubes and hair funnels may be more effective than other methods, and may detect the presence of uncommon or trap-shy mammals.

Tubes are usually custom-made from readily available materials. Hair funnels are cone-shaped devices, with or without a bait compartment, and having sticky pads lining the inside of the cone.

The major ethical consideration in using hair tubes and hair funnels is that small vertebrates may become permanently stuck, suffering a slow and inhumane death. This accidental capture is often referred to as by-catch. Also, hair tubes made from PVC tubing of an inappropriate diameter may trap animals by the head.

The use of sticky materials should never be used to capture live animals, as it causes unacceptable pain and suffering. In the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1985* regulations, it is illegal to “apply a silicon gel to any tree, plant, building or other structure or thing for the purpose of catching birds”. When any sticky material is used to obtain hair samples, the utmost care should be taken to prevent any vertebrate by-catch, by minimising the opportunity for small animals to access sticky areas:

- Tape pieces should only be placed on the upper portion of the sides, and the top of the tube or funnel, to reduce the chance of trapping small reptiles or other by-catch.
- The pieces of tape should be small enough that they do not permanently entrap any vertebrates.
- The type of tape used should not be excessively sticky so that it does not permanently entrap any vertebrates.
- The use of glue-like substances or products is not appropriate due to the excessive stickiness of these compounds. They have been found to result in high by-catch rates.
- Hair-tubes and hair funnels should initially be monitored frequently, until it is established that the brand of tape selected, and the amount applied, is appropriate and does not result in vertebrate by-catch.

- If using PVC tubing as a hair tube, the diameter of the pipe should be selected so as to avoid the possibility of animals becoming trapped by the head. About 60 mm in diameter is generally suitable. Hair tubes and funnels should be fixed in place using a method that does not cause an entanglement hazard. A nail through the centre of the tube, or tent pegs at the edges of a hair funnel, is the preferred method. If wire is used to secure a hair tube, it should be wound very tightly so that the limbs or feet of animals exploring the tube do not become trapped in loops of wire.
- As with any accidental death, please report any vertebrate by-catch to the Wildlife Ethics Committee executive officer at the earliest opportunity.

Other use of tape to collect hair

Any use of tape to collect hair (e.g. at wombat burrow entrances) should be done in a way that minimises the possibility of vertebrate by-catch. Tape should be set at a height at which it is out of normal reach of small mammals and reptiles, and not in a way in which birds could perch on the tape. Tape should be supported on non-climbable material (e.g. a metal pole rather than a timber stake) to prevent access by arboreal reptiles.

Feather and hair plucking

- Collection of feathers should whenever possible be limited to breast or back feathers. Growing or "blood" primary feathers should not be removed.
- Sensory hairs (whiskers) should not normally be removed.
- Hair or feather removal should be limited to the minimum required for analysis, (usually 2-3 feathers or a few hairs). Removal should never leave bare patches of skin, as this could affect temperature regulation or water repellence.

CONTACT

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