

Natural
History
Museum

Top Tips

A selection of tricks, thrifty tips and thingamajigs from the conservation team at The Natural History Museum in London

We would like to share some of the handy materials, modified tools and innovations we have found over the years that can help make the care and conservation of natural history collections easier, cheaper and more environmentally friendly.

An assortment of little things that can make a big difference.

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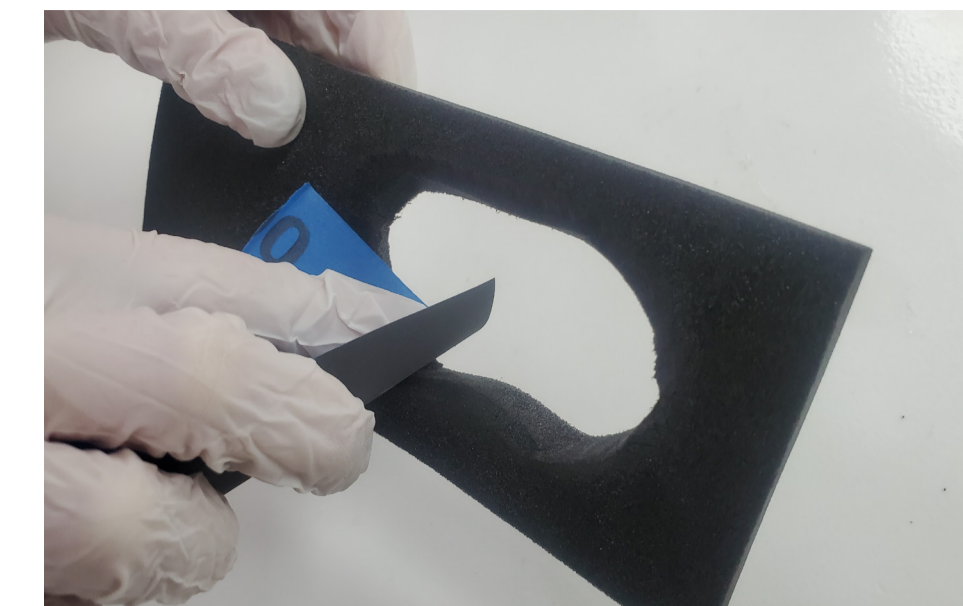
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Saving Paint



A small, flat-lidded sealing plastic box can be turned upside down and used as a paint palette and keeper. Paint goes onto the lid and this can be hand-held as a portable palette; the body of the box acts as a palette protector and semi-airtight seal, reducing paint waste. LB

Shaping Plastazote®



After trimming down Plastazote® to your required shape the edges can be further shaped and smoothed using sanding paper. This can soften the edges even further for delicate items and improve the appearance when used on display or for mounts. AB

Bits Pillow



Hang a bag made of Tyvek® under your workbench and gradually fill with chopped up off cuts of Plastazote™. When full, seal the top and you will have a useful pillow for supporting specimens, while saving waste material from landfill. LAJ

Mini Sandbags



When filled with sand a regular party balloon makes a great temporary supportive sandbag that will hold its shape well when pressed. These can be very handy for supporting awkwardly shaped specimens when photographing and while adhesives are drying/curing. ER

Double Trap



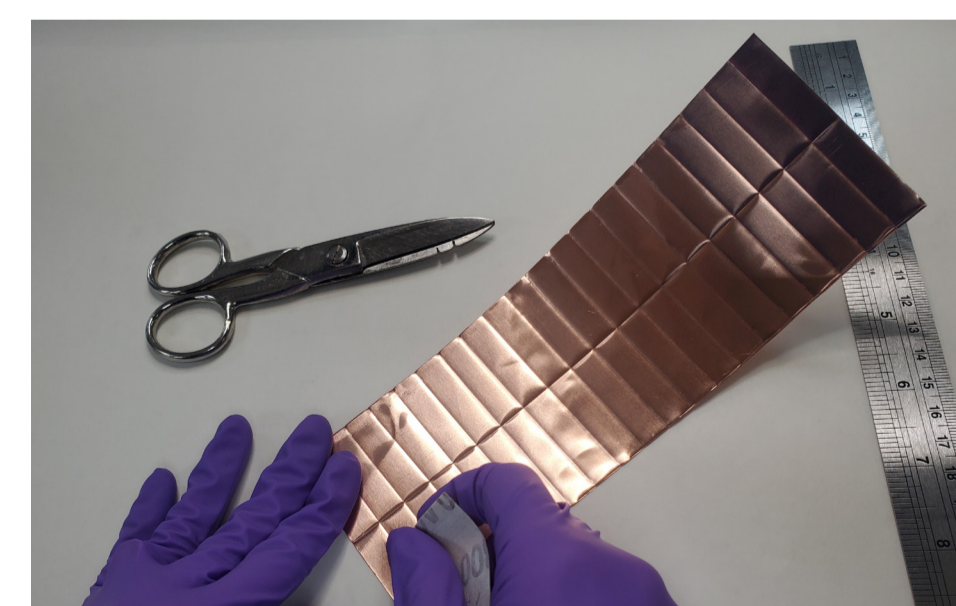
Combine a blunder trap for crawling insects & pheromone lure (we use them for Clothes Moth–Tineola Bisselliella) and stick the cut strip inside the triangular trap. Contrary to common belief, you will catch more moths placing your traps closer to the ground than on a high level. AM

Gel Removal



Cosmetic sponge is excellent for removing solvent gels, before clearing with the appropriate solvent. Remember to dab not drag to prevent scratching. LAJ

Speed up Oddy Test



When preparing the Oddy metal coupons, rather than abrading each tiny coupon individually with micromesh, it is easier to score a large piece of the metal sheet using a needle with the desired number of coupons and then abrade the whole sheet of metal, both sides. Once it is all evenly abraded it is possible to cut the individual coupons along the ridges made by the needle using scissors. FP

Hazard Mitigation



Lead was often used inside taxidermy ears. Skin along the ear is prone to split, exposing lead to the air, promoting lead corrosion which is powdery and easily airborne. A quick way to mitigate exposure is to create a labelled enclosure. This temporary enclosure helps protect people accessing the specimens, reducing the risk of producing more lead airborne particulates that can be inhaled. FP

Silicone Anti-Slip



Created for earthquake-prone touring venues to prevent movement of objects. Press a layer of silicone sealant between two sheets of Melinex®, peel the Melinex apart to create two disks of silicone. Allow to cure for 24-48 hours. The disks can then be applied to the base of stable objects and plinths. Areas such as labels can be protected by Melinex. CT1® clear silicone was Oddy tested and passed in 2022. CM