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In the future, the unit is planning to preserve viable embryos and the frozen tissue collection will support a broad range of research. The Museum of Natural History, which is part of the Smithsonian Institution, has no dedicated frozen tissue facility. Cryogenic vats, similar to those used at the AMNH, are kept within the molecular facility based out at their off-site store.

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### *AMNH & Smithsonian Fish Collections*

*James Maclaine: Department of Zoology, The Natural History Museum*

One of the first things that caught my eye upon entering the fish collections of the AMNH was the aquarium room bubbling away on our left. During my time in the BCG I have seen a few spirit stores come and go and it was nice to see some live animals in fluid for a change. Our guide Barbara Brown kindly allowed us a quick look inside and it was especially pleasant to see amongst the obligatory cichlids, tanks containing *Malapterurus*, the electric catfish. Dr Peter Moller, one of the resident researchers is a keen adherent of these sturdy little fish and their electrical abilities. "Their discharges are beautiful to me!" he exclaimed as we passed his door later on. Beside the catfish was another tank containing a shoal of small goldfish, which Barbara informed us, served primarily as dinner for their whiskery neighbours.

The main spirit collection filled three largish rooms. The jars were kept in wooden boxes, which were ordered systematically upon grey metal racking. The specimens were stored in 75% IMS after the cheaper preservative isopropyl alcohol was found to be dehydrating. We were told that in total the AMNH fish holdings comprised of two million spirit specimens, twenty thousand alizarins, twenty thousand skeletons and contained many important collections from Congo, Gabon and Vietnam. There was also an impressive tally of eight coelacanths, including the specimen that, after dissection, confirmed that these strange fish give birth to live young.

The jars themselves were primarily of the polypropylene plastic top variety which allegedly performed well as long as the store was kept constantly cool, no mean feat in New York where the temperature and humidity undergo massive fluctuations throughout the year.

The collections at the Smithsonian were stored in two main areas, some at the museum itself and many more at a large storage facility offsite. Their fish holdings are ostensibly the largest in the world and comprise of some three and half million specimens, over 8000 of which are types. These incidentally were arranged in an attractive colour scheme with holotypes being painted red and paratypes being white.

Our host this time was Susan Jewett who kindly showed us round the museum store and detailed to us the saga of their glassware problems. It seems the Smithsonian curators are not the greatest fans of ground glass breed of container, even going so far as to throw quantities of them away, a fact that raised a few eyebrows amongst our group. Instead the preferred jars were of the screwtop and Le Parfait variety, and it was interesting to hear about the various gasket trials they had been through before selecting an attractive rubber white variety.

We visited the offsite store the following day, a short bus journey outside of Washington. This was an entirely different proposition to the main museum and basically resembled a huge gloomy warehouse. As our guide on this day was an invertebrate person (as in she worked with them, NOT that she was devoid of a spine) I wasn't able to glean much information about the fish collections stored therein, but it was nonetheless an enjoyable and fascinating experience.