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Introduction

This is the seventh part of our series on the Ten Agents of Deterioration; the risks facing museum collections.

The next issue will deal with Pollutants. These could be cumulative over a period of time, such as items becoming contaminated by substances due to inadequate storage, or possibly an incidence of direct pollution e.g. the effects of a gaseous leak on specimens. Please do send in articles on the issue of Pollutants; in many cases it is only after the event that one considers the risk.

For details of recommended standards of light and UV levels for the display and the storage of natural history specimens see:

'2. Standards in the Museum Care of Collections of Biological Collections.1992' p. 54 ISBN 0-948630-18-3

and,

'3. Standards in the Museum Care of Collections of Geological Collections.1993' pp. 49-51 ISBN 0-948630-20-5

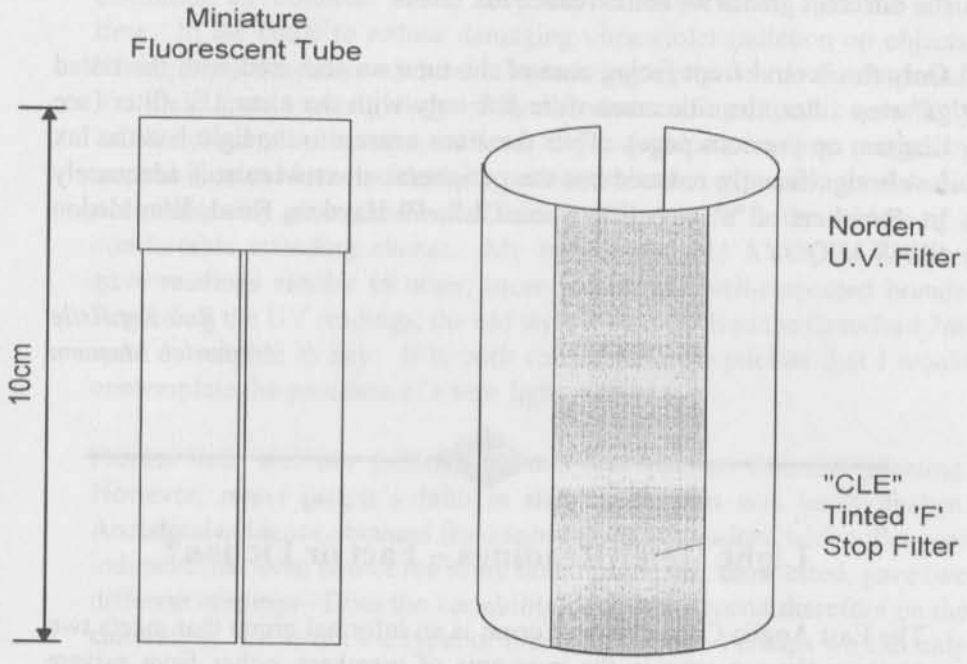
Both published by the Museums and Galleries Commission, U.K.

Old Polecats Never Die, They only ……..

Whilst re-displaying the Natural History Galleries in Ipswich Museum we found that some specimens had been on display so long they had completely faded on one side.

Some like the polecat in the title had faded on one side only, the side facing the gallery. The opposite side still retained its natural colour. Displaying these specimens the other way round was not an option. The polecat could not be used for educational purposes as mercuric soap had possibly been used during its preparation, and it could not be displayed in its faded form.

I decided to re-colour the specimen taking the unfaded side as my guide. Any re-colouring had to be reversible, so I used Windsor and Newton pigments blended/mixed to the right colour, and applied the pigment with a dry brush. The pigment was simply trailed through the previously



cleaned fur. Since no medium has been mixed with the pigment it can be removed by vacuuming.

All the specimens were re-displayed in the original Victorian wall cases which had been re-wired and given a new lighting system. The new lighting system consisted of small 4 inch high, low voltage fluorescent tubes. These were placed centrally, four to a case. Although the lighting system was more discreet the light intensity in the central area was very severe, up to 1000 lux and the UV was above the recommended levels. The lights did not have a dimming facility, and in any case dimming them would have thrown the edges of the cases into almost total darkness.

The problem was how to reduce light in the central areas of the case and still retain adequate lighting for specimens on the periphery.

We cut down Morden fluorescent UV light filters into five inch lengths and down the central portion stapled CLE tinted "f" stop filter to cut lux levels. The filter comes in a number of grades "f" stop 1, 2 and 3. By combining