



STRATEGIES FOR PEST CONTROL IN NATIONAL MUSEUMS OF ARGENTINA

Summary

Infestation by pests, as agents of deterioration that threaten heritage, is a problem of utmost importance in every museum or institution. This situation is not foreign to any collection or building structure, hence our need to design and develop strategies for pest control according to the general and particular conditions of the Dirección Nacional de Museos (DNM) which was created in 2016 through the Secretaría de Patrimonio del Ministerio de Cultura, which supports 23 museums with different types of collections, all located in the Northwest, Cuyo, and Central regions of Argentina. This large geographic area means that we must consider a wide variety of pests as well as the different collections, climates, and buildings.

From August 6-8, 2018, the first National Museums Conservators' Meeting was held at the Museo Malvinas e Islas del Atlántico Sur in Buenos Aires. During this meeting, a pest control protocol was initiated in response to issues raised by colleagues from various DNM-affiliated institutions.

The result was an interactive table consolidating pest problems, needs, and other relevant data for each museum into a single, digestible format. This tool provides a holistic view of pest control across all DNM museums and serves as a communication platform for independent and cross-regional access. It fosters collaboration and resource optimization among museum professionals.

Since 2018, the Dirección Nacional de Museos of Argentina has been dedicated to designing and applying strategies to address the wide variety of pests related to the different collections, climates, and building structures that contain them.



List of the National Museums and their geographical distribution on the map of the Argentine Republic, represented by the red dots. (Figure 1).



Figure 1

After the first Meeting of Conservators of the National Museums, the DNM Conservation Team—a centralized group of conservators and restorers working with all institutions under the National Secretariat of Culture—began developing a pest control protocol. This initiative addressed issues identified during the meeting, acknowledging that not all National Museums have trained conservation professionals.

The protocol was designed to tackle key problems: lack of pest identification, uncertainty about the products used by pest control companies, inadequately detailed fumigation contracts, and the need to improve communication between museum staff and the DNM. Additionally, there was concern about contracting services in provincial museums without adequate provisions.

In response, the DNM team created a tool to meet the needs of the 23 museums, providing a comprehensive solution tailored to the specific situation of each institution.

It is important to highlight that this work is part of a broader study conducted by the DNM, stemming from the Comprehensive Collection Conservation Plan (PICCS). To achieve this, various tools were developed to address different issues and support each museum. Thus, in order to implement a pest plan, we adapted recommendations from the IIC, ICC, and the Museum Pests Working Group to the specific needs of the Directorate based on practical experience in the museums.



Figure 2. Palacio San José, Entre Ríos

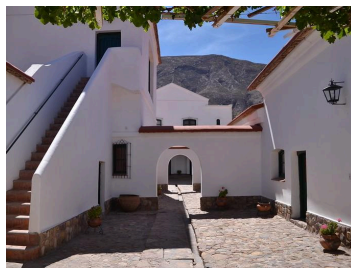


Figure 3. Museo Terry, Tilcara



Figure 4. Museo Nacional del Cabildo, Buenos Aires

This tool was developed as an interactive table to unify the information from museums into a single repository. It facilitates cross-referencing between museums and the DNM, which liaises with the Infrastructure Directorate of the Secretaría de Cultura de la Nación, which manages fumigation services. The database now serves as a comprehensive pest identification and control plan.

Additional information has gradually been added to the table, including details such as products used and recommended pest control methods like cleaning, maintenance, and application of physical barriers. Museum directors were asked to assign a contact person at each institution and provide a floor plan to map the locations of identified pests and assess the use of physical barriers. The interactive tool features an initial table with visual and textual descriptions of pests, their scientific names, the materials they commonly affect, and the location where each pest was found.

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Method of use:

The interactive chart was created in a spreadsheet and is shared through an online storage platform with a folder labeled for each institution. These documents are accessible to the designated contact person and the director of each museum; floor plans and a folder containing reports from companies since 2020 are also uploaded. Each spreadsheet presents several additional tables (described below) all of which each museum completes, except for the “Evaluation and Recommendations” table:

- **PEST IDENTIFICATION:** This includes any additional pests not already present in the pest chart. Museums are asked to update the information every six months, if necessary.
- **PREVENTION:** Here, each institution indicates the legislation or regulations according to their province/city, which, for example, may include frequency of fumigation, prohibited materials, and others.
- **PEST EVALUATION GUIDE - EVALUATION OF THE VULNERABILITY OF THE COLLECTION AND BUILDINGS:** This guide lists the materials constituting each collection by museum.
- **EVALUATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS:** This is the only table completed by the DNM, with advice from the team's biochemist.
- **EVALUATION OF THE PEST TREATMENT SERVICE**
- **SPECIAL TREATMENTS**

Field experience:

Although the identification was presented and adapted according to the aforementioned bibliography, the museums added pests that did not originally appear in the table but are specific to certain regions. Then all these results were compiled into a general database for a complete analysis by the DNM.

Survey work was a very important evaluation factor aimed at verifying whether the project implementation met the needs of the museums as well as keeping the issue active during the pandemic in 2020.

There were infestations in some museums, which did not directly affect the heritage, such as the case of yarará snakes. When studying the reasons why these animals were found in Palacio San José, since they had never appeared before, it was concluded that



the lack of pruning of the grape vines located on the patios, and lack of maintenance of the grass due to the pandemic, attracted insects. These, in turn, attracted bats and rodents and finally the snakes. In the same vein, skunks, woodpeckers, and a large number of parrots approached the same museum, which is located in a rural area. Another case reported the increase of rodents found in museums located in restaurant and food-centered areas; due to the closure of many food-based businesses during the pandemic, these pests went out in search of food elsewhere.

To address these new pest issues, consultations regarding treatment were held with different entities on protected species and how to scare away animals such as bats, woodpeckers, and yarará among others. Centralizing the information from the DNM also allowed us to share treatment experiences between museums.

Since 90% of the museum buildings are historical monuments with heritage protection regulations limiting possible modifications, we worked with the architecture professionals of the DNM on the physical barriers, giving them possible solutions.

The practice of hiring cleaning services was reinforced for the museums that do not otherwise receive outsourced services. We also promoted pest monitoring using adhesive traps while the amount of monthly fumigations was reduced.

The link between maintenance (the interruption of services for different reasons including the pandemic, lack of suppliers, administrative issues, and delays in budget execution) and the appearance of pests was evident.

The fumigation companies were asked to send the technical data sheets of the products used. This allowed for monitoring the service and verifying if the museums received the treatment.

Current Project Outcomes:

Cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary collaboration has been central to this project, utilizing existing resources like online storage and communication tools. The project's continuing success relies heavily on museum leaders who update the plans and manage relevant services and mitigation actions.

Although the project doesn't fully resolve pest issues, due to various influencing factors, over six years it has established a foundational approach with actionable potential. It also

facilitates transitions when new authorities or conservators come on board, providing immediate status updates and background reports.

Surveys indicate that the project has enabled the national museums to make key decisions, such as reducing food areas or modifying waste management, to deter pests. It has also improved communication by allowing conservators to report directly to the DNM, leading to quicker responses. For instance, at the Museo y Biblioteca de la Casa del Acuerdo de San Nicolás, this led to prompt action against a termite infestation, circumventing bureaucratic delays.

The project has also clarified information about pest control products and allowed museums to request insecticide rotation due to resistance issues. Monthly records of pest control products have improved monitoring and planning, as seen at the Museo Histórico Nacional, which uses a system to track product use and to adjust strategies.

Additionally, receiving reports from pest control companies has aided in evaluating distinfestation effectiveness and confirming service delivery. In 2020, 50% of institutions installed physical barriers like screens and weather stripping to prevent pests. Notably, the Museo Histórico Sarmiento installed screens on all windows and doors to reduce flying insects, reflecting its commitment to preserving its historical value.

New Projects

We are developing two key projects to address pest issues in museums with comprehensive and sustainable approaches.

The first project is the Invasive Vegetation Treatment Guide, which will provide tools and methods for identifying and controlling invasive plants in museums. This guide will include ecological strategies for managing these plants and recommended practices to prevent their reappearance, as well as implementation training for museum staff.

The second project is the Gardens and Maintenance Project, aimed at improving the management and care of museum gardens and parks. It will include a diagnosis of green areas, design and maintenance plans with native and pest-resistant plants, and the establishment of regular maintenance and monitoring systems. It will also include staff training in sustainable gardening and ecological pest management.

These projects not only address pest issues but also promote sustainable practices to conserve natural and cultural heritage. Additionally, an administrative resolution is being



developed to establish pest control as a mandatory public service.

Bibliographic references

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- National Pest Management Association <https://www.pestworld.org/>
- Museum Pests.net. <https://museumpests.net/>
- Do It Yourself Pest Control Online <https://diypestcontrol.com/>



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https://www.mapa.gob.es/es/agricultura/temas/sanidad-vegetal/parquesy jardines_web_tcm30-542251.pdf



Reference Museums:

Figure 1

<https://museoterry.cultura.gob.ar/> (Figure 3).

<https://museodelnorte.cultura.gob.ar/>

<https://casadelaindependencia.cultura.gob.ar/>

<https://museoliniers.cultura.gob.ar/info/visita/>

<https://museojesuitico.cultura.gob.ar/info/museo/>

<https://casanatalesarmiento.cultura.gob.ar/informacion/visitas-guiadas/>

<https://museourquiza.cultura.gob.ar/noticia/historia-del-edificio/> (Figure 2).

<https://museodelacuero.cultura.gob.ar/>

<https://museomalvinas.cultura.gob.ar/exhibicion-permanente/>

<https://museoyrurtia.cultura.gob.ar/>

<https://museosarmiento.cultura.gob.ar/>

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<https://museohistoriconacional.cultura.gob.ar/>



Short biography

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Mariana Valdez is coordinator of the conservation and restoration team of the National Directorate of Museums, project manager of the Sub-Secretariat of Heritage, and advisor to the National Commission of Monuments, Places, and Historical Assets. As a conservator, she specializes in building work, easel painting, and mural painting.

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Ivana Rigacci has a degree in conservation and restoration of cultural assets from Universidad del Museo Social Argentino. As a conservator Ivana specializes in textiles at the National Directorate of Museums. Since 2005 she has worked in museums and public and private institutions. She has participated in historic flag and textile restoration projects nationally and internationally. She is a member of the Chilean National Textile Conservation Committee.

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