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Natural history museum turns 10 with activities galore

It will have an open house, tours, events to celebrate a decade of zoological discovery

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The Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum welcomed a record number of visitors – 88,200 – in 2024. The museum, which averages 65,000 visitors a year and is part of the National University of Singapore, looks set to exceed that number in 2025 as it hosts a series of events to mark its 10th anniversary.

The Republic's only natural history museum, which was launched on April 18, 2015, will hold an open house on May 18. Entry on the day is capped at 600 visitors. All tickets were snapped up on April 18.

Adults can look forward to complimentary guided tours, while children can take part in activities like scavenger hunts and educational games.

A new pop-up planetarium, which seats up to 15 people, will feature at the event. A Journey Through Singapore's Natural History, a 15-minute in-house production by the museum, will be projected onto its concave screen for all to enjoy.

The museum's lead education officer, Ms Jharyathri Thiagarajah, said: "The original feature will showcase deep-sea expeditions, species discoveries and international research collaborations."

An exhibition named A Decade Of Discovery: Stories From The Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum will run from May 7, 2025, to May 3, 2026. It will feature collections dating back to the 1840s and outline the museum's current role in preserving and showcasing the region's natural heritage.

Visitors can sign up for a Night At The Museum from May 30 to June 6, where they can roam around the museum after its regular opening hours. A heist-themed palaeontology adventure will take place from 7pm to 10pm, where visitors can play detectives and solve a mystery involving stolen dinosaur fossils.

The festivities will conclude with the museum's first public research symposium on Sept 6. It will bring together researchers and citizens to discuss the role of natural history museums in shaping research and conservation.

Sign-ups for the Night At The Museum and research symposium events open on April 18.

Before 2015, natural history in Singapore was studied at the National Museum and Raffles Museum of Biodiversity Research. The Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum's earliest predecessor was the Raffles Library and Museum, which became a public institution in 1878.

Today, the museum houses over a million zoological specimens, an increase from about 500,000 at its inception in 2015, said the museum's deputy head, Associate Professor Huang Danwei.

"By examining and comparing specimens in the Zoological Reference Collection, the museum has helped to advance local conservation and scientific research," Prof Huang said.

"These specimens serve as historical snapshots of species and ecosystems, allowing researchers to track changes in species distributions, population dynamics, and ecological shifts over time."

Many of these samples are obtained through local and regional field surveys, such as the Comprehensive Marine Biodiversity Survey, which ran from 2010 to 2015, and sought to catalogue Singapore's marine biodiversity.

The museum has also been instrumental in identifying novel wildlife across Singapore. For instance, the saddle barb (*Barbodes sellifer*), a freshwater fish native to the Malay Peninsula, was discovered in Nee Soon Swamp Forest in 2021 and was described by the museum researchers as a new species.

Guests viewing computer-generated artwork in the Nature Remixed exhibition at Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum on May 20, 2024. It will hold an open house on May 18, 2025, as well as several activities for its 10th anniversary. ST FILE PHOTO

Its scientists played a key role in editing the third edition of the Singapore Red Data Book, which compiles critical information on Singapore's flora and fauna, such as their local and international conservation status.

Associate Professor Darren Yeo, head of the museum, said: "By providing an up-to-date assessment of the nation's biodiversity, this book will serve as a vital resource for future conservation initiatives."

The museum's Aspiring Naturalist Programme, launched in 2022, offers young people a chance to experience various fields in science, such as entomology, ornithology and mammal conservation.

To date, it has engaged more than 100,000 students via this and other educational programmes, including its evolution workshop for tertiary-level students.

On what the next decade holds for the museum, its team said it plans to expand – both physically and in its research and outreach capabilities. Upgrades to its facilities and systems are on the cards.

"This will enable more robust comparative analyses, helping researchers identify new species, track environmental changes, and inform conservation efforts more effectively," Prof Huang said.

Prof Yeo said additional exhibition spaces to enhance public engagement will allow the museum to showcase South-east Asia's flora and fauna in more effective and diverse ways.

While taxonomy, or the classification of living and extinct organisms, will remain at the heart of the museum's research, Prof Yeo emphasised its desire to explore new frontiers of science, such as artificial intelligence.

It will also seek to deepen collaboration with Asean researchers, he said. As a research hub for South-east Asian biodiversity, it will seek to further partnerships with regional universities and institutes to create opportunities, especially for early-career scientists.

Prof Yeo said: "Through research and education, we seek to inspire students and the public, cultivating a deeper appreciation for biodiversity and environmental issues.

"Ultimately, we strive to ensure that biodiversity remains relevant in the lives of present and future generations."

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