

Museum unveils dino stars



PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI FOR THE SUNDAY TIMES

Guests snapping pictures of the three diplodocid sauropod dinosaur skeletons, Prince, Apollonia and Twinky, on display at the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum yesterday.

Visitors will get to see giant attractions when museum opens doors to public on April 28

Audrey Tan

Singapore's newest museum, the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum, yesterday unveiled its prehistoric stars Prince, Apollonia and Twinky.

The three diplodocid sauropod dinosaurs, among the biggest creatures to walk the earth 150 million years ago, were viewed by more than 250 guests, including President Tony Tan Keng Yam.

The skeletons are displayed un-

der special lighting and with sound effects. Judging from the crowd's reaction to the four-minute "dino show", which is played every half-hour, this will be a star attraction.

The seven-storey museum at the National University of Singapore (NUS) in Kent Ridge opens its doors to the public on April 28 and offers much more than giant bones.

It has 2,000 other specimens, including a prized Asian Brown Flycatcher bird collected by British naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace, co-founder of the theory of evolution alongside Charles Darwin.

Singapore's first natural history museum traces its roots to the original Raffles Museum, the oldest such institution in the region.

Established through philan-

thropic gifts totalling \$56 million, it aims to be a leader in South-east Asian biodiversity and conservation research, education and outreach.

Aside from its public exhibition space, a large area will be set aside for more than a million specimens to be used for research, with classrooms and teaching labs.

Dr Tan said in his speech: "This museum will serve to educate many generations of Singaporeans on the importance of protecting our heritage and contribute to regional and global biodiversity research."

A 200-year-old, 2.7m tusk of the narwhal, a marine mammal known as the "unicorn of the ocean", which once belonged to Singapore pioneer "Whampoa" Hoo Ah Kay,

caught the eye of Mr Bernard Toh, 55, director of projects and communications in the NUS Office of the President.

"The narwhal's spire is such an elegant piece," he said. It was donated to the museum by Whampoa's great-granddaughter last year.

Environmentalist Ria Tan gave the thumbs up to the heritage gallery with its "Cabinets of Curiosity".

Visitors can open doors and drawers to learn more about the displays, which include animal specimens used for research.

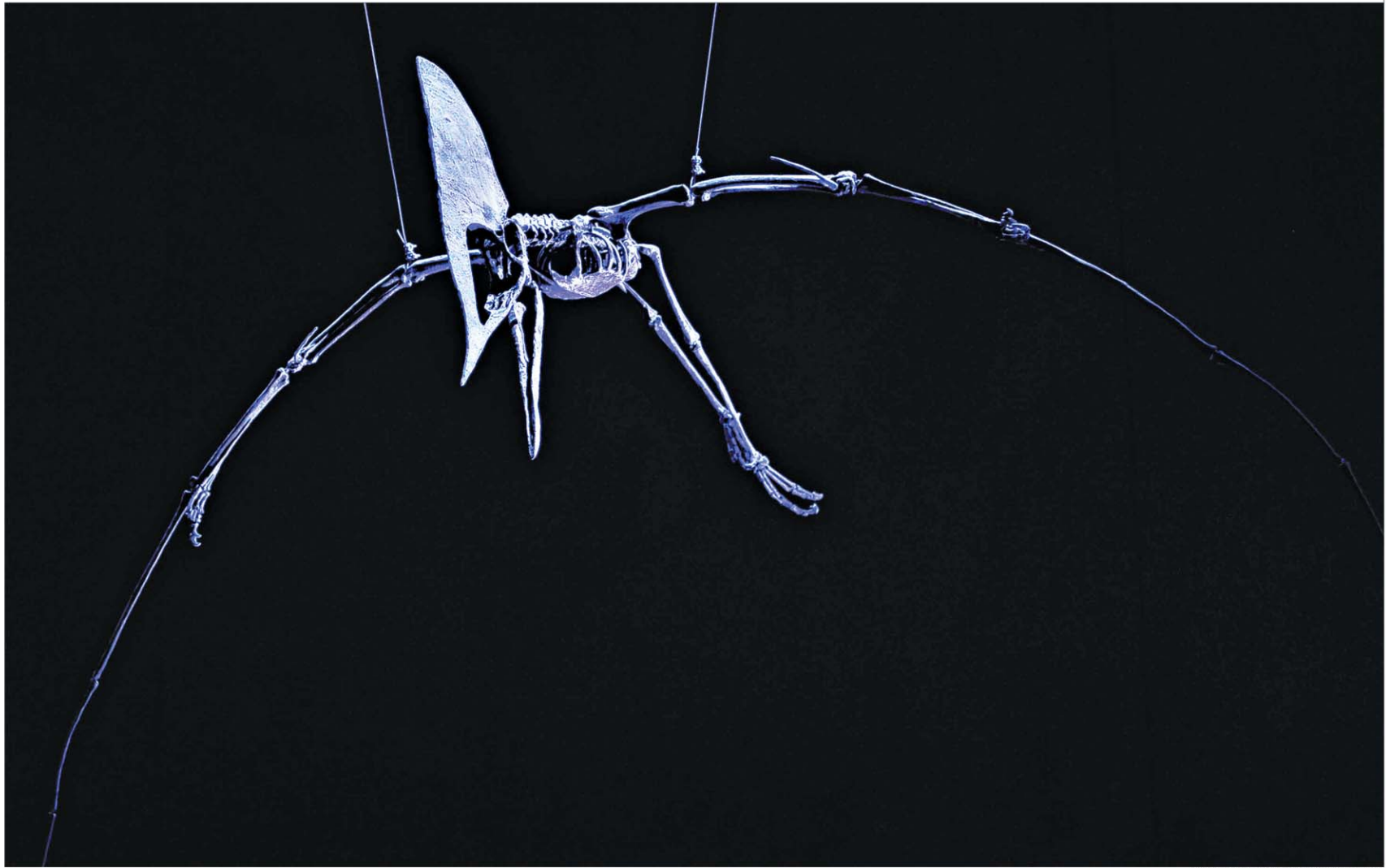
Said Ms Tan: "To me, this is why we have a museum – it's not just pretty stuffed animals but about science, learning, understanding, and passing it on to the next generation."

One artefact, a leather-bound book called *An Introduction To Malayan Birds*, was written by British ornithologist Guy Charles Madoc using typewriter and paper taken covertly from the Japanese when he was in Changi Prison during World War II.

The \$8 million dinosaur skeletons, of which Prince is the largest at 4m high and 27m long, are the museum's centrepiece. They were acquired in 2011 from an American fossil company that found the remains between 2007 and 2010.

Said 22-year-old NUS student Sean Yap, another of yesterday's guests: "The dinosaurs are going to be a crowd puller."

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See >> **Top News Page 10**



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A pterodactyl reptile display in the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum's main biodiversity gallery. The other section in the 2,000 sq m exhibition space is the heritage gallery, where visitors can explore Singapore's natural history.

The weird and the wonderful

Audrey Tan

From bones of the extinct dodo bird to a 1.75m-long specimen of a leatherback sea turtle caught on Siglap Beach in 1883, the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum showcases "the weird and the wonderful".

This was how one of the first guests at the museum described her experience yesterday after a two-hour walk through the museum's biodiversity and heritage galleries.

"It was fascinating, and it will be able to open the eyes of young people," said Ms Sharon Tan, 49, the director of the National University of Singapore Centre for the Arts.

The seven-storey, 8,500 sq m building was officially launched by President Tony Tan Keng Yam yesterday, bringing to fruition a labour of love by NUS professors Leo Tan and Peter Ng.

They had led efforts to build the facility and helped raise the \$46 million to make it happen. The building fund came largely from

Dinosaurs, animals and fossils among natural history museum's treasures

the Lee Foundation, which gave \$25 million.

Said Prof Tan, who is director of special projects at the NUS Faculty of Science: "The museum is a biodiversity museum, not only of Singapore but of South-east Asia."

"It behoves us to demonstrate

to future generations the beauty of our natural history and the vital role it plays in ensuring the survival of the human race."

The 2,000 sq m exhibition space is divided into two sections: the main biodiversity gallery, where the dinosaurs are located, and the heritage gallery where visitors can explore Singapore's natural history and treasures including birds and bears accumulated over 137 years.

In all, the museum is home to more than 560,000 catalogued lots of specimens, from animals to fos-

sils, which were from the vaults of the former Raffles Museum. The collection dates back to 1849.

Tickets to the museum, which will open to the public on April 28 and is closed every Monday, are sold only through Sistic.

For Singaporeans and permanent residents, tickets for a 1 1/2-hour viewing session cost \$15 per adult and \$8 per child.

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For a video sneak peak, go to <http://str.sg/3TA>



(Above) Sime Darby senior independent director Henry Barlow and historian J. Kathirithamby-Wells sitting beside an enclosed orang utan specimen.

(Right) An Asian brown flycatcher bird - one of the most prized possessions on show. The specimen was collected by British naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace, the co-founder of the theory of evolution.



(Above, from left) Mr Wong Ngit Liong, NUS Board of Trustees chairman; Dr Della Lee, DS Lee Foundation chairman; Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean; President Tony Tan Keng Yam; Professor Peter Ng and Professor Leo Tan viewing a replica of the Rafflesia.

(Left) An exhibit of a tiger skin. Tigers were hunted to extinction in Singapore.

