

SPECIMENS ON SHOW



BIRD OF PARADISE

This preserved specimen is of a bird of paradise, known for its glorious plumage and elongated feathers. The specimen sits on a rotating plate which visitors can toggle for a closer look.



BABY ORANG UTAN

This is a specimen of a stuffed baby orang utan. Still visible are the stitches on its abdomen, and its eye sockets are plugged with cotton wool.



KOALA

The koala, a plant-eating marsupial native to Australia, is represented here to illustrate the Wallace Line, a biological barrier separating the species of Asia and Australia, with each bearing unique characteristics.

Journey of evolution

Bukit Timah beetles helped naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace form his evolution theory

Kezia Toh

British naturalist Charles Darwin made the theory of evolution famous. But there was another naturalist, Alfred Russel Wallace, who formed the same theory through his independent observations in the mid-1800s.

Some of Wallace's ideas were shaped by an eight-year sojourn in South-east Asia, including Singapore. When he was here, he spent time collecting beetles in the Bukit Timah forest, adding to a massive collection of more than 200,000 specimens of insects, birds and mammals.

Although Darwin published his findings first, Wallace noticed trends in the

distribution and appearance of animals on his own and observed how they evolved via natural selection.

To mark his death centenary, the Science Centre and National University of Singapore are co-presenting an exhibition on Wallace, curated by science historian and Wallace enthusiast John van Wyhe, 41, who is also senior lecturer in the departments of biological sciences and history at the university.

Called *Island Adventurer: Alfred Russel Wallace And The Quest For The Origins Of Species*, it will run from today till Nov 30 next year.

The exhibition is divided into six zones which take the visitor chronologically through the life of Wallace and his search for the theory to explain life.

It sets the scene by first explaining the demand for collectors of scientific specimens during the Victorian era. It also covers the Wallace Line, a biological barrier separating the species of Asia and Australia, each bearing its own characteristics.

The highlight of the exhibition is a replica hut with a rustic scientific work

station – a favourite with Dr van Wyhe.

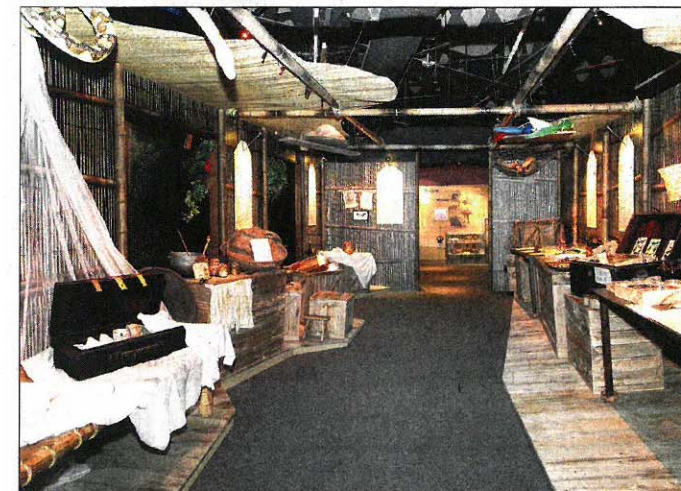
He explains: "It really feels like we have walked right into Wallace's home environment in the 1850s, and it also showcases a lot of real specimens, down to the details of the labelling of these specimens."

These specimens – while not those personally collected by Wallace – are from the Raffles Museum of Biodiversity Research, including stuffed versions of a baby orang utan, a koala and a leopard cat as well as giant Rhinoceros beetles and a Bird of Paradise.

Personal items from Wallace can be loaned for only a limited time period, and was "not feasible" for the year-long exhibition, says Associate Professor Lim Tit Meng, 53, chief executive of the Science Centre.

Known Wallace artefacts include manuscripts of books he had written, which are housed in the British Library; and shields, axes and utensils from the Amazon, the Malay Archipelago and North America, now in the British Museum.

Accompanying each section of the exhibition



Island Adventurer: Alfred Russel Wallace And The Quest For The Origins Of Species has a replica hut (left) that has a scientific work station. ST PHOTOS: CHEW SENG KIM

are side panels with activities for schoolchildren, such as matching the male and female versions of a bird species, based on evolutionary clues such as wing and beak patterns.

Prof Lim says: "This exhibition, through the theme of exploration, discovery and adventure, will shed a different light on the natural history of our region... and hopefully inspire more students to go into the field of science discovery."

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Book it

ISLAND ADVENTURER: ALFRED RUSSEL WALLACE AND THE QUEST FOR THE ORIGINS OF SPECIES

When: Till Nov 30 next year, 10am to 6pm daily
Where: Science Centre Singapore, Hall B, Mezzanine Floor
Admission: Included in ticket to Science Centre, \$12 for adults, \$8 for children
Info: www.science.edu.sg