

BENGAL NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM, DARJEELING

HISTORY:

With the establishment of the Northern Bengal State Railway in 1878 and connection with Darjeeling in 1881 with the name Darjeeling Himalayan Railway the popularity of Darjeeling as Hill Station spread eventually and visitors began thronging the Hill Station, many were amazed by the faunal diversity of this place. As recorded during that period the mammalian species comprised between 80-90 species including some of the rarer cats, pandas and the Himalayan flying squirrel. About 450 species of birds- nearly one-fifth of the total species found in the Indian sub- continent, 100 species of snakes, exceedingly rich in insects and butterflies.

With this richness in 1903 the Lt. Governor of Bengal intimated the Govt. of India of his idea of starting a small Museum at Darjeeling, allowing the visitors to the hill station an opportunity to obtain information about the rare and exotic Birds and Butterflies of the district.

A suitable site was chosen in the *Lloyd's Botanical Garden* (1838) and a building was constructed for the purpose. The Museum was looked after by the committee comprising the Dy. Commissioner, Tea Planter, The Vice Chairman of Darjeeling Municipality, Deputy Conservator of Forest and an Executive Engineer. This arrangement proved unsatisfactory and in 1915 **Lord Carmichael**, Governor of Bengal took an interest in the Museum and the former building was completed in the year 1915. The maintenance was still a problem and in spite of approaching the Indian Museum, Calcutta and the Zoological Survey of India the offer was turned down for the upkeep of the Museum. It was finally decided that the Bengal PWD would be responsible for the building; the committee for arrangement directly saw the requirement of a Curator. In 1922 it was proposed that a Natural History Society should be established to take over the Museum and be responsible for its maintenance and the publication of small quarterly periodicals. Thus, Darjeeling Natural History Society was accordingly formed which took over the management of the Museum in 1923 with the aims and objectives as follows:

- To promote the study of Natural History of Northern Bengal and Eastern Himalayas and to get together a representative collection of the fauna of North Bengal and the adjoining parts of Sikkim, Nepal and Bhutan.
- Maintaining the Natural History Museum
- To engage in such other acts as are incidental or conducive to the attainment of the above objects.

Mr. Charles M. Inglis, an amateur ornithologist was persuaded to accept the post of the Curator. He served the Museum for 26 years from 1923- 1948 and built up the Museum by also adding his own private collection.

HANDING OVER OF BENGAL NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM TO PADMAJA NAIDU HIMALAYAN ZOOLOGICAL PARK

On the keen interest of the Ex- Governor of West Bengal **Shri. Gopal Krishna Gandhi** who wanted the museum to be shifted to the Padmaja Naidu Himalayan Zoological Park, the museum was officially handed over to the Park on 07.01.2010, till date which was directly under the control of the Wildlife Division-I for its upkeep and maintenance and further upliftment of the museum in the near future. Hence, the entire specimens (exhibits) were transferred to the P.N.H.Z.P premise, where an entirely new infrastructure was erected in the year 2015.

Bengal Natural History Museum, Darjeeling, provides the keen visitors with precious knowledge on the natural world and resources, significant enough to generate the commoner's awareness about natural environ. Bengal Natural History Museum, Darjeeling, enchants visitors with a fascinating presentation of diverse nature, full of flora and fauna, the museum is not only important from the archaeological point of view, but also focuses on the process of natural evolution.

There are a wide variety of items in the exhibit area at present. All the items on display including the stock have been inventorised. Later these items have been digitized by photographing each items and also providing informations of the items thus making it easier to preserve, access, and share in the form of a book. The items at the museum includes Skull, Antlers, Horns, Head mounts, Full body mounts, Skin of different animals, Tusk & feet of Elephant, Birds, Pheasants, Nests and Eggs of various Birds, Pheasants, Dragonflies, Insects, Grasshoppers, Moths, Beetles, Butterflies, Snakes and Fishes etc.

PRESENT STATUS:

The Bengal Natural History Museum is currently located within the premise of the Padmaja Naidu Himalayan Zoological Park. The construction of single block had begun in the month of July 2010 and was successfully completed in the year 2015. Early 2016, witnessed the construction of a new block meant for a separate 'Taxidermy Unit'. It is located adjacent (left) to the Museum.

During the construction two members of the Inspection Team **Prof. (Dr.) S. Suneja**, Head of Department, Landscape Architecture and **Mr. R.S. Bhadari I.F.S (Retd.)** of the Central Zoo Authority, and the Officials from N.M.N.H (National Museum of Natural History) New Delhi, visited the museum and the construction site on 17.12.2010 and 27.04.2011 respectively, to give in their valuable ideas and suggestions. On 15.11.2010, **Sr. Dinabandhu Biswas**, Biology teacher of Ajoypur High School donated a large number of species which have already been added to the collection.

Padmaja Naidu Himalayan Zoological Park, aims to uplift the museum by increasing the present collection, making it more interpretive through exhibiting- Biodiversity of West Bengal, Different types of Eco-system, dioramas etc, and also continue imparting knowledge on Diversity of Eastern Himalayas, Conservation Breeding, and Wildlife etc through this medium (museum).