Museum homecoming for President Tan

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ABOUT 25 years ago, President Tony Tan Keng Yam launched a collection that was to play an instrumental role in the growth of the Raffles Museum of Biodiversity Research in Kent Ridge.

Yesterday, it was like a homecoming when he was invited to tour the place, one week before the packing starts on one of the largest collections of South-east Asian animals in the region.

The museum is moving to a new and larger home next year, about 850m away on the National University of Singapore campus.

It will be renamed Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum.

“It’s very interesting for me to see how it has evolved and still playing an extremely valuable scientific and national role,” said President Tan after an hour-long tour of the public gallery and the compacted shelves, where most of the specimens are kept.

The collection has grown from 160,000 in 1988 — when President Tan, then education minister, opened the Zoological Reference Collection at the NUS science faculty — to 500,000 now.

Calling the museum a “national treasure”, President Tan said a proper natural history museum is “highly needed in Singapore” and will be a valuable addition to the country’s medley of museums and the study of nature.

Its director Peter Ng said the museum’s closure marks “the end of one cycle”.

In the last 25 years, it has grown beyond being just a reference collection for scientific research. In 2001, a public gallery was created as the museum embarked on outreach, education and heritage programmes.

“We want to do it on an even grander scale in our new home,” said Professor Ng.