

# ZSI's collection to be thrown open to public at museum

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**KOLKATA:** For the first time, more than 40 lakh zoological specimens (from ants to elephants) that were collected over the past 250 years by scientists, the largest collection in the world, will be thrown open to the public by Zoological Survey of India to observe its centenary year.

"Till date only scientists and research scholars, having proper permission, had access to the National Zoological Collection at the Zoological Survey of India in Kolkata. It is the largest collection of animals in the world having more than 40 lakh specimens representing nearly 17,000 species. For the first time we would throw this open to the public on July 1 as a part of our centenary celebrations," said K Venkataraman, ZSI director.

Senior officials said ZSI maintains a gallery at the Indian Museum. But that is just a miniscule portion of the entire collection housed in ZSI headquarters at New Alipore. Even though it would be thrown open to public on July 1, plans are afoot to keep this open for a few more days. Scientists would be there to guide the visitors and answers their queries.

"The theme of our centenary year celebration is 'Taking Science to Public'. We would like citizens to know what we have and what we do. Hence such an initiative," said Venkataraman.

Some of the collections are



■ **Pink headed duck.**

more than 200 years old and were collected by scientists from neighbouring countries such as Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Bhutan and Myanmar.

"While there are mounted specimens of several animals starting from beautiful, large and colourful butterflies to animals which are now thought to be extinct such as the pink headed duck, cheetah and Malabar civet, there are around 300 trunks full of animal bones. Many of these collections are yet to be identified," said a senior official. Digitisation of the National Zoological Collections has been undertaken on a priority basis, including digital imaging of the specimens. Preparation of pictorial catalogues of zoological collections has also been undertaken.

The ZSI was established on July 1, 1916. Come this July it

would kick off its year-long centenary celebrations.

"On July 1 scientists of ZSI (former and present) along with schoolchildren and other dignitaries including footballers and Olympians would take part in a Foundation Day run. It would be flagged off from the Asiatic Society, from where ZSI worked before 1916. The participants, many of whom are senior citizens, would then walk and run to ZSI headquarters in New Alipore," said B Mitra, a ZSI scientist.

Such programmes (foundation day run) would be organised not just in Kolkata but in all the other 16 regional centres of ZSI across the country. He also said that the ZSI is planning a series of programmes including seminars, workshops, training programmes and awareness sessions throughout the year.