

Chinese businessmen and community leaders. Hoo was one of the original founders of the Agri-Horticultural Society that later became the Botanic Gardens. When his pet orangutan died on 30 June 1878, he donated it to the museum for mounting. The Botanic Gardens Zoo, which functioned between 1875 and 1905, was also a source of donations when the animals died (*see* Box Story, p.32). Ordinary folk, when the opportunity presented itself, also sent donations to the museum. For example, a Malay fisherman captured a 12-foot long crocodile in Sunghie Battu Belyhar near Telok Blangah in July 1878 and brought it to the Central Police Station, which proceeded to send it to the museum.<sup>25</sup> Another crocodile, this one measuring 11 ft in length, was killed and sent there by John Fraser of Trafalgar Estate after it had devoured a woman on the Punggol River in 1886.<sup>26</sup>

The following items were presented to the museum after the animals were hunted: a large male peacock shot by a group of young men in July 1879;<sup>27</sup> the head and antlers of 'a splendid deer—a buck—weighing 500 lbs' shot by a Mr Barclay in August 1879; an old tiger, said to be 50 years old, shot by an old Malay plantation caretaker in Telok Paku in November 1878;<sup>28</sup> the skin of another large tiger, measuring 8 ft 9 in length, which was shot near Tampines in January 1886 by Daniel Maw; and lastly, a panther, shot at Carrington House on Mount Sophia.<sup>29</sup>

One of the most remarkable species collected by the museum was the *luth* or Leathery Turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*). A dead specimen was found on the beach near Siglap in 1883. The Malay villagers were

2.7 Leathery  
Turtle found dead  
on the beach near  
Siglap in 1883 by  
Malay villagers



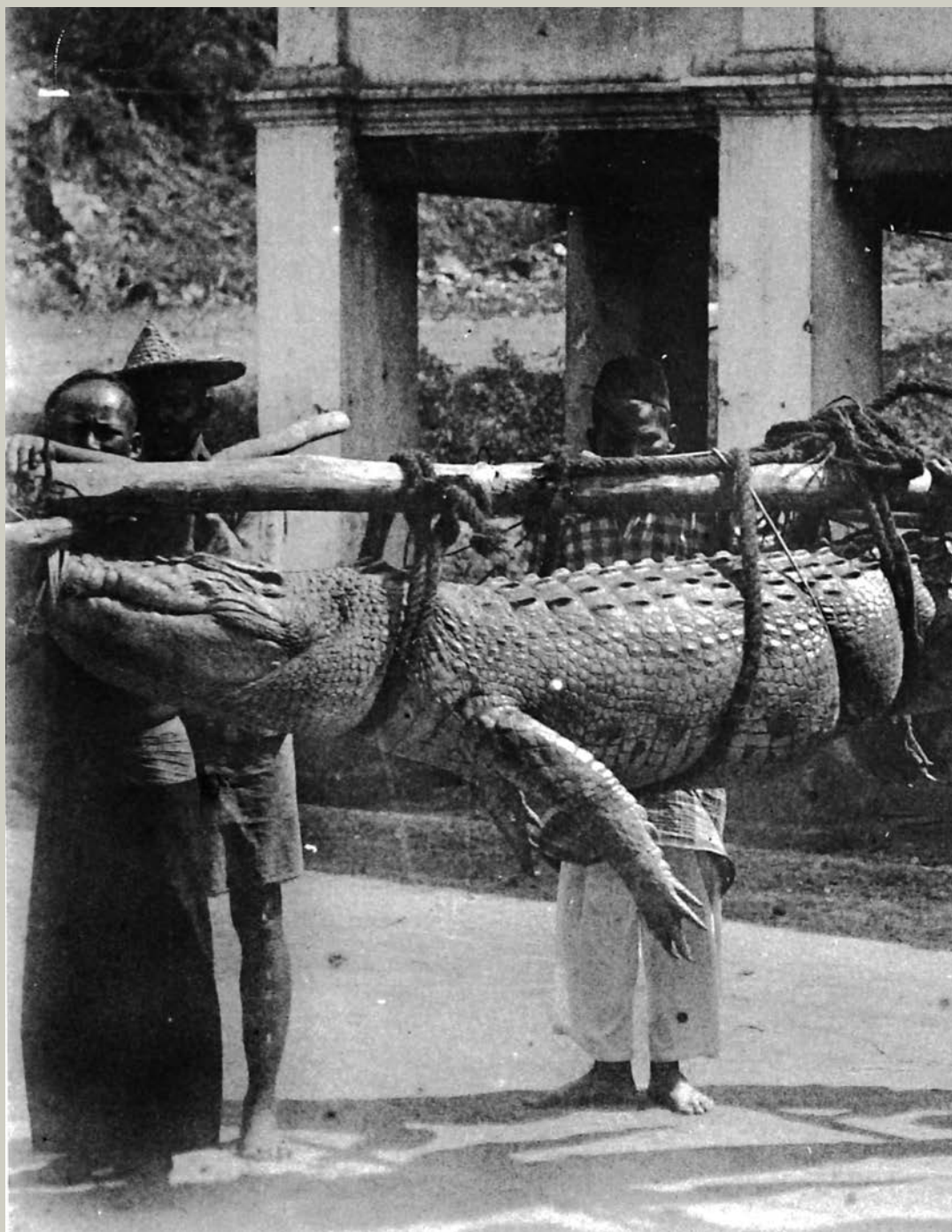
was able to report that the ‘difficulty experienced in 1888 of keeping the Zoological collections, specially the insects, free from mould, has not been so great during the past year, and as the walls of the Museum become thoroughly dry this difficulty will be considerably lessened.’<sup>5</sup>

While the problem of damp seemed to have improved with passage of time, this was not the end of Davison’s problems. In September 1891, the museum would suffer a major termite infestation, which would only be the beginning of a long-term problem. The termites attacked the staircase but fortunately left all other exhibits intact.<sup>6</sup> Some issues of newspapers and ‘many copies of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, and all the remaining copies of the 1st Supplement to the Catalogue’ were destroyed. Davison’s curator’s quarters were severely attacked, forcing him to vacate,<sup>7</sup> and his personal collection of rare butterflies was damaged.

The high expectations of the museum were further heightened with some notable specimen contributions in 1888. The first was a specimen of a young Malayan tapir presented by Governor Sir Cecil Clementi Smith. The specimen had been carefully mounted and was to be placed alongside the adult tapir specimen already in the museum’s possession. The second was an enormous crocodile (15 ft 5) shot and donated by George Paddison Owen, one of Singapore’s most well-known big-game hunters and colourful characters.<sup>8</sup> The Assistant Superintendent of Police, Rowland Conolly, presented the museum with a 21-foot reticulated python, and two sawfish came by way of Dr Thomas Rowell (Principal Civil Medical Officer) and Captain J. G. Trewin of the *SS Meanatchy*.<sup>9</sup> In 1889, ‘high profile donors’ included George Copley—former Curator of the museum and Secretary of the Municipality in Malacca—who purchased and donated ‘a nearly adult tigress, an adult female Sun Bear (*Helarctos malayanus*), and an adult male of Temminck’s Golden Cat (*Felis temmincki*).’ John Pickersgill Rodger, British Resident of Pahang also presented the museum with a ‘fine adult cow of the seladang (*Bos gaurus*), that year.’<sup>10</sup>

## Popularity and Extended Hours

The museum continued to be extremely popular among the locals. As Davison informs us in his annual report for 1888, a large number of visitors requested him to open the museum on the same nights as the reading room.<sup>11</sup> Davison considered this proposal quite seriously but concluded that while it may ‘double the number of visitors’ to the museum if it opened at night, it would be necessary to light it with ‘at least 20 good lamps’ and such kerosene lamps would pose a major fire hazard.<sup>12</sup> Besides, the ‘windows would have to be kept closed (for the damp night air would soon ruin those specimens not under glass)







3.2 The enormous 15 1/2 ft crocodile shot by George P. Owen in 1887 at the Serangoon River and presented to the museum