

## A Podcast Guided Tour of Shanghai Entomological Museum

Leave the traditional guided walks behind and strike out at your own pace with an audio guide. This bilingual podcast is presented by Shanghai Daily and supervised by the Shanghai Science and Technology Committee.

Insects are probably the most successful life forms on the planet. Scientists have already found about 800,000 species of insects - far more than all the other animal groups combined. "Indeed, in no one of her works has Nature more fully displayed her exhaustless ingenuity," claims Roman author Pliny the Elder in his masterpiece, *Natural History*.

Today we will take you into the wonderful world of insects – The Shanghai Entomological Museum is located within the Shanghai Institutes for Biological Sciences in Xuhui District. Walk about 100 meters from the entrance and turn right, you can see a white building. The first and second floors house the museum's collections.

**The exhibition hall on the first floor is divided into two zones with different themes.**

To begin the journey, walk through the section that looks like a "time tunnel," which explains the evolution of life on the earth through colorful pictures. Here we learn that insects arose more than 400 million years ago, much earlier than dinosaurs did. Ever wondered what ancient insects look like? Go find out at the end of the tunnel where a showcase displaying their fossils stands.

While the "time tunnel" runs through the middle of the first zone and takes up much of the space, everything in the zone is carefully arranged so that it does not look crowded.

The outer walls of the tunnel are hung with pictures of familiar insects (including the cockroach, cicada, locust and flea) as well as those of strange species. Take a close look at the picture numbered 122. What is it? A flower? No, it's an orchid mantis, which looks almost exactly like the orchids it sits on. In addition, there are pictures of two insect-eating plants: a Venus flytrap, and a Nepenthes (also called Pitcher Plants; Exhibit No.123).

To the left of the "tunnel" is a section where insects' body parts are on show. Here you will see specimens of insects' antennae, eyes, legs, mouths and wings. Alongside them are interactive exhibits which can simulate the function of insects' body parts.

Next to the specimens are nests of wasps (Exhibit No.111) and termites (also known as white ants; Exhibit No.112). The most eye-catching exhibit in this section is a replica of the ant colony in the corner. Press different buttons on the control panel and different chambers will light up correspondingly: rooms for nurseries, food storage, worker ants, the ant queen, etc.

The section to the right side of the "tunnel" introduces insects' behavioral patterns, including breeding & growth, and camouflage & defense. There are also eight touch screen computers where you can learn more about insects through amusing games.

**Have a rest before we visit the second zone.**

A big picture of the insects' evolutionary tree greets you as you enter the second zone, which has the theme of "insects' world." The higher the form of the insect, the higher the place it occupies on this tree.

In biology, the insect empire consists of 34 orders, or countries. Want to meet the residents? Let's explore their specimens from the left to right, in the order of lower to higher forms. Allow me to add a few words about a specimen of a rare species of leaf insect (Exhibit No.207). It is called *Phyllium sinense* and found only in Tibet. Like the orchid mantis we saw in the first zone, this insect is truly a master of disguise.

Exhibited in the middle of the zone are beautifully framed dead butterflies and moths which merit special attention. Here you can see two of the museum's most treasured possessions: the world's most magnificent moth, the sunset moth (*Chrysidia riphearia*; Exhibit No.211 ) and China's rarest butterfly, *Teinopalpus aureus* (Exhibit No.214).

Indigenous to Madagascar, the sunset moth is a poisonous insect which has sunset-like rosy streaks on its wings. *Teinopalpus aureus* can only be found in China. The wings of the male species are emerald, dotted with a golden mark on the hind wings.

**Take a short break and we'll continue our journey to the second floor.**

The exhibition hall on the second floor is also split into two zones.

"Insects and People" is the topic of the third zone. First, let's take a look at exhibits about our loyal friends - bees and silkworms- on the right side of the zone. Go straight ahead, you can find traditional Chinese medicines related to insects, including Chinese caterpillar fungus and the skins shed by cicadas when they molt.

The display cases in the middle of the zone will help you develop an intimate knowledge of the natural environments where insects live. Here you can see real live crickets, cockroach, katydids, silkworms, and stick insects. The silkworms are fed with pigmented food here so that they can produce colorful silk. This way of silkworm feeding is still a craftsman's industry, awaiting the development of mass production.

On the left side of the zone, you will get to know pests like termites, cockroaches and cotton bollworms. Just beside the exhibit on termites, you can find a lock of hair with the world's oldest known flea on it (Exhibit No. 326). This was taken from a 3888-year-old mummy found in Loulan, Xinjiang Province.

Have a rest, and then we will visit the fourth zone with the theme of “Insects and Culture”.

On your right are specimens of amazing insects, including a dead-leaf mantis (disguised as a dry leaf), jewel beetles, Goliath beetles (the world’s biggest bug) and Imperial Cicadas (the world’s biggest cicada).

Prominently displayed in the middle of the zone are framed specimens of dead butterflies with striking colors and patterns on their wings. Morpho Helena (Exhibit No.417) is the most beautiful and expensive one among them (each specimen costs 360,000 yuan). It lives in tropical rain forests in South America. With dazzling iridescent wings, the male butterflies of the species can produce colors varying from pale blue to purple blue from different viewing angles.

In the far left corner of the zone, there are katydid cages, living and fighting places for crickets and even mini-coffins for crickets.

A short distance away, the wall is hung with three pictures assembled from the wings of Morpho butterflies that are native to Brazil.

We’ve completed the journey to the exhibition halls. Before concluding the whole trip, pay a visit to the multimedia room and interactive laboratory behind the white building. All kinds of video programs about insects are available in the 100-seat multimedia room, while you can examine tiny insect specimens with the help of 40 powerful microscopes in the interactive laboratory.

We hope you enjoyed your visit to the Shanghai Entomological Museum.

Address: 300 Fenglin Road, Xuhui District

Opening hours: 9:00am - 4:30pm (open all year round)

Ticket Price: 15 yuan

To get there, you can either take Metro Line No.4 (get off at Dong’an Road Station), or take bus No.43, 49, 72, 89, 104, 128, 218, 572, 733, 806, 814, 820, 847, 864, 932, 984, 985.

For details, call the museum at 5492-4201 or 5492-4188.