Endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful…

These words – from Charles Darwin’s conclusion in *On the Origin of Species* – seem to be equally fitting for the diverse activities taking place in celebration of his achievements. When we look back to the beginning of the Darwin200 partnership – a handful of people around a table in late 2006 – it is indeed from such simple beginnings that things most wondrous have evolved. From the onset we aimed to avoid a narrow polarised debate about evolution and creationism, and instead to explore the richness of Darwin’s contributions to science, the diverse ways in which his ideas have impacted on human thought, and how they are increasingly relevant to the world around us and to the future of life on Earth.

It has been hugely rewarding to see how this wider perspective has been embraced by the media. The BBC in particular is to be congratulated for the thought-provoking programming they have put together for their *Genius of Evolution* season. I would be surprised if you haven’t been sharing anecdotes about how ‘…even the little old lady next door was talking to the baker about Darwin’.

Darwin200 partners across the UK have made a really engaging beginning and we anticipate with excitement the diverse programme that will emerge over the coming months. What is being achieved is not just a celebration of Darwin’s achievements, but a re-evaluation of his contributions to human thought that is reaching widely and challenging the perception of what Darwin and evolutionary biology is really all about.

The weather may have bought the UK to a halt but it didn’t deter creative responses to the bicentenary (faithful species under domestication with snow Darwin) © Paul Pearson
A toast to Darwin

Darwin’s achievements were celebrated around the UK on his two hundredth birthday. While these were rightly joyous they also allowed us to reflect. Among the poetry of Emily Ballou, the visual art and the biographical exhibition at the Natural History Museum there was also sincerity as the Minister of State for Culture Media and Sport Andrew Burnham unveiled a plaque on the Darwin statue that quotes Darwin’s own words:

Freedom of thought is best promoted by the gradual illumination of men’s minds, which follows from the advance of science.  

Charles Darwin

It was exciting to see the Church of England making it clear they are receptive to the evidence of evolution and both the Vatican and the Church of Scotland publicly saying they believe theology and the science of evolution can be reconciled. While others will have their own perspectives on this, what I think can be welcomed by all is how this helps reinforce the need to look at scientific evidence. If we accept the evidence of where we have come from, then this also clearly points to issues of the future for people and the natural world.
This timely message on the significance of evolutionary evidence was also highlighted at Christ’s College Cambridge. While they honoured the young Darwin of college days with a new garden and sculpture, they also chose to celebrate by working with the Galapagos Conservation Trust to host a fund-raising dinner for the Charles Darwin Galapagos Research Station. Darwin pointed us to our current understanding of the nature of biodiversity and we now need apply this insight for the benefit of our future. As we raised our glasses, it was interesting to consider if they were half full or half empty.

**Down to Earth**

Charles Darwin was also being celebrated in the Kent village of Downe. There English Heritage reopened the Darwin family home with its informative new exhibition on the upper floor. As English Heritage had a surge in visitor interest, Down House and the surrounding countryside has also been at the centre of what we hope will be one of the greatest legacies of Darwin year.

Bromley Council, working with the Department of Culture Media and Sport and supported by English Heritage and the Charles Darwin Trust, has nominated the area as a World Heritage Property. *Darwin’s Landscape Laboratory* includes the house and Darwin’s experimental garden as well as seven square kilometres of the downland, including Great Pucklands Meadow, where Darwin conducted the first biodiversity survey as well as the hedgerows of Darwin’s famous ‘entangled bank’.

The hope is that this countryside where Darwin meticulously observed nature will become an inspiration for future generations on our approach to biodiversity, ecosystems and the role nature can play in helping people adjust to the effects of climate change. The outcome of the bid should be known over the next 18 months, see [www.darwinatdowne.co.uk](http://www.darwinatdowne.co.uk).

**Darwin on show – cont’d**

*Darwin at Down* is an exhibition of photographs of Darwin and his family on display at the Horniman Museum until 7 June.

The exhibition *Mr Darwin’s Fishes* at the Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution is open until July. It tells the story of the *Beagle* fish specimens being described for the first time. Darwin’s lifelong friend, eminent naturalist and Bath resident, Leonard Jenyns, worked on the fish Darwin brought back from South America. Using original material from the BRLSI collections, the exhibition will reveal new insights into Darwin’s approach to research and how he worked with his contemporaries.

The Joint Research Council’s *Darwin Today* includes three copies of a travelling exhibition that have already been booked for 25 sites across the UK. The exhibition is aimed at engaging young audiences in how Darwin’s ideas inform modern research. It opens simultaneously at three venues: The Centre for Life in Newcastle, Sensation – the Dundee Science Centre, and at Living Coasts in Torquay. The exhibition is supported by a website, events programme, school resources and a discussion forum. Find out more about the RCUK Darwin Today programme at [www.darwin.rcuk.ac.uk/](http://www.darwin.rcuk.ac.uk/).
Transmutation Diary www.darwin200.org March 2009

Open to Darwin

Discovering what you may have looked like millions of years ago is proving an appealing way for many people to explore evolution. The Open University’s face-morph website game, Devolve Me (www.open.ac.uk/darwin) allows users to upload a picture and see themselves travel back in time to re-appear as an Australopithecus afarensis (3.7 million years ago), a Homo habilis (2.2 million years ago), a Homo erectus (1.8 million years ago) or a Homo heidelbergensis (500,000 years ago). Since it launched over 27,000 people from more than 100 countries have visited the website. Stephen Fry even wrote on Twitter that it was ‘Coolissimo’.

This is of course helping introduce the Open University’s new short course, Darwin and Evolution. The course is entirely flexible and can be studied part-time by people at home, and it’s first run is already over target. Supporting the course are the co-productions with the BBC that began with Charles Darwin and the Tree of Life, presented by David Attenborough. It was viewed by over 6 million people when it first aired in February. A free Tree of Life poster with stunning graphics has been produced by The OU to accompany the BBC co-productions – already over 150,000 copies have been snapped up! The posters are available to request from www.open2.net/darwin.

Jimmy Doherty in Darwin’s Garden (BBC Two) and Darwin’s Dangerous Idea (BBC Two) presented by Andrew Marr, are currently being shown and Life, narrated by David Attenborough, is coming this autumn to BBC One.

The OU’s Annual Broadband Lecture is presented this year by Professor Richard Dawkins. Followed by a questions and answers session with a panel of Darwin experts, the event will be webcast live from the Natural History Museum on 17 March (via www.open.ac.uk/darwin).

National Science and Engineering Week The theme of change is embracing many Darwin-inspired activities during this year’s NSEW from 6–15 March. Large events include the Newcastle Science Festival, Cambridge Science Festival and the Darwin in Space competition where children are invited to draw and describe the life forms that Darwin might have discovered on one of four environmentally different and isolated islands on an alien planet. Darwin’s work was also celebrated at the Big Bang science festival in Westminster QE II Conference Centre 4–6 March.

For curious minds

Celebrate Darwin’s birthday by inspiring young naturalists to get outdoors and explore nature with The Curious Mind of Young Darwin published by Shrewsbury based charity The Field Studies Council. It is packed full of hints and tips for young naturalists to help them explore the local environment just as Charles Darwin did 200 years ago. Join 12-year-old Charles ‘Gas’ Darwin as he prepares pitfall traps in his garden, hunts for the green tiger beetle, carries out kitchen experiments with milk, oil and treacle, goes tree beating and explores the structure of flowers with a magnifying glass.

Contact FSC Publications www.field-studies-council.org/publications
Darwin and the Arts

A Duck for Mr Darwin

A Duck for Mr Darwin – Evolutionary Thinking and the Struggle to Exist is a group exhibition of contemporary artists exploring evolution and the theory of natural selection, opening at the Baltic on 10 April. The exhibition focuses on the legacy of Charles Darwin’s ideas and is informed by the spirit of experimentation that was so distinctive to the time in which he lived. The mindset of the Victorian naturalist and his contemporaries, their sense of scientific experimentation and genuine wonder at their respective discoveries are shared by several of the artists in the exhibition.

The exhibition title references the story of an exchange of letters between the young naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace and Charles Darwin. In 1857, Wallace was to send Darwin a specimen – a domestic duck from the island of Lombok. Just a year later he would send a short twenty page essay on species variation. This correspondence proved to be an important catalyst precipitating the publishing of Darwin’s monumental theory – On the Origin of Species in 1859.

A Duck for Mr Darwin presents artworks from nine artists, including several new commissions. The work mixes fact and fiction, experimentation and observation, methods of display and several artists’ own research of, and journeys to, the Galapagos Islands. See www.balticmill.com/darwin

TREE

The fieldwork for TREE – the Darwin bicentenary artwork commissioned by the Natural History Museum – was completed at Longleat Estate with the creation of a new biodiversity pond, where the 20 tonne oak tree root was extracted, and by the planting of 200 oak saplings in protected areas around the park. The final planting of a ceremonial tree in front of the house by

Shift Life is a hands-on installation being displayed in Shrewsbury as part of The Shift-Time-Festival of Ideas from 2–12 July and later at Wolverhampton Art Gallery. The piece will comprise a large sand box equipped with sensors and tools for pouring liquids, applying lights/heat, shaking the contents etc. These physical actions will inform the sensors which will change parameters instantly, affecting a virtual world of fantasy creatures that must adapt to survive the changes in their ecosystem. The developers at the University of Wolverhampton are looking for more venues for the installation. Contact Dr Dew Harrison Dew.Harrison@wlv.ac.uk.

The Hurstpierpoint Players in Sussex have agreed to put on New Zealand playwright Michael Burton’s play Collapsing Creation (or The Sex Life of Barnacles), as part of the Hurst Festival in September. The play was first performed on 12 February this year in New Zealand, and the production may be able to tour. If interested, please contact enquiries@hurstplayers.org.uk or michaelburton@clear.net.nz.

A conference, The Art of Evolution: Charles Darwin and Visual Cultures, is taking place on 1–4 July at the Courtauld Institute of Art, Somerset House. It is being convened by Barbara Larson and Fae Brauer, editors of The Art of Evolution: Darwin, Darwinisms and Visual Culture, which will be launched at the conference by The University Press of New England. For more information, please contact Fae Brauer faebrauer@aol.com.
The artist Tania Kovats and Lord Bath marked the completion.

*Darwin’s pool and Lord Bath with Tania Kovats © Natural History Museum*

*TREE* will be launched at the Natural History Museum on 18 March, opening to the public on 19 March and will feature in a Radio 4 documentary in April. See [www.nhm.ac.uk/visit-us/whats-on/coming-soon/](http://www.nhm.ac.uk/visit-us/whats-on/coming-soon/)

### Gorillagorillagorilla

This new work by the Californian artist, Diana Thater, is currently on display at the Kunsthaus Graz in Austria until 17 May. The installation, produced in collaboration with the Natural History Museum in London, is a study of human and animal behaviour and the artist’s further investigation of the medium of video as an image production tool, capable of creating impressive spatial and visual environments. The work will be on display in London in June as part of the *After Darwin: Contemporary Expressions* exhibition. For more information, see [www.kunsthausgraz.at](http://www.kunsthausgraz.at)

### Darwin Overseas

#### Turkey

The Faraday Institute for Science and Religion in Cambridge is organising a Darwin Symposium in Istanbul. Given the opposition to evolution among more fundamentalist elements in the country, this is an important and welcome effort. They have created an exciting programme of presentations ranging from the social reactions to Darwin to the application of evolution in self-assembling systems. See [http://darwin200istanbul.org](http://darwin200istanbul.org) or contact Nicole Maturen nm437@cam.ac.uk

#### South Africa

Durban Natural Science Museum, Durban Botanic Garden and the University of KwaZulu-Natal have created a diverse programme of exhibitions and public programme activities, education workshops and seminars for Darwin’s birthday and through the year.

#### Austria

*God: The Fossil Record*

An exhibition by nine international artists is open at the Stadtmuseum St Pölten in Austria until 22 March. The new Darwin-inspired works cover a wide range of media, including painting, sculpture, installation, film, animation and photography from Frederick Baker, UK; Hubert Blanz, Germany; Peter Braunsteiner, Austria; Paul Bush, UK; Martin Huxter, UK; Waltraud Palme, Austria; Mark Rossell, NZ; Martina Tscherni, Austria and Margret Weber-Unger, Austria. For more information, see [http://www.stadtmuseum-stpoelten.at](http://www.stadtmuseum-stpoelten.at)

cont’d
The evolutionary history of life includes two primary components: phylogeny and timescale. Phylogeny refers to the branching order (relationships) of species or other taxa within a group and is crucial for understanding the inheritance of traits and for constructing classifications. However, a timescale is equally important because it provides a way to compare phylogeny directly with the evolution of other organisms and with planetary history such as geology, climate, extraterrestrial impacts and other features. This authoritative reference work brings together, for the first time, experts on all major groups of organisms to assemble a timetree of life. The result is a comprehensive resource on evolutionary history that will be an indispensable reference for scientists, educators and students in the life sciences, earth sciences, and molecular biology. The Timetree of Life Edited by S Blair Hedges and Sudhir Kumar, Oxford University Press ISBN10: 0199535035

After Darwin200 – from the origin to the future of species – the International Year of Biodiversity

In February we began to receive from partners the short evaluation form on how the Darwin200 partner initiative had impacted upon their organisation. The initial responses are overwhelmingly positive with some good thoughts for improvement too – so please do share your views with us.

On 3 March, some 69 organisations participated in a ‘no preconditions’ discussion on taking the learning and the partnership beyond 24 November the 150th anniversary of On the Origin of Species and when Darwin200 will close, on into a new partnership supporting the International Year of Biodiversity. There was unanimous support, and although we still have to put together the secretariat business case, we hope to provide a core service to help such an important activity. Do contact me for more information. I can provide a variety of resources for you to share with colleagues so you can discuss your position on this major event, which needs your engagement. Hopefully you will join us. Contact Bob Bloomfield r.bloomfield@nhm.ac.uk

Mexico City
The Natural History Museum in Mexico City is celebrating Darwin with two exhibitions, one to coincide with a major book fair in March and the other opening in November. For more information, contact Rosa Linda Fragoso, rosita.de.maiz@gmail.com.

Australia
Super Human: Revolution of the Species is a series of events run by the Australian Network for Art and Technology in Melbourne investigating collaborative art and science practices and their relationship with the human body. The focus of events is a symposium is being held from 22–25 November, currently calling for abstracts. There will also be an exhibition of intriguing and living artworks drawn from the worlds of nanotechnology, neurology, cognition, biology and augmentation, and an art science curating masterclass. For more information, see http://www.superhuman.org.au or contact Amanda Matulick amanda@anat.org.au

Spain
The Open University of Catalonia has an e-learning community that connects over 55,000 people from over 45 countries. Their Darwin programme includes a series of conferences and debates that will be filmed and posted online, an urban safari in Barcelona’s Parc de la Ciutadella, a guided trip to the Galapagos Islands and breakfast with Darwin to launch their new food area, bringing in experts to discuss Emma Darwin’s cookbook. For more information, contact Francesc Remoli, fremoli@uoc.edu
Lily, Ash and Joseph the tortoise invite your organisation to follow in Darwin’s footsteps... with The Great Plant Hunt and Darwin-inspired Thinking Walks!

Engaging with schools...

The Great Plant Hunt has been created by Royal Botanic Garden, Kew (RBG Kew), and commissioned and funded by the Wellcome Trust.

In March 2009, RBG Kew will send the UK’s 22,000 state maintained primary schools a treasure chest full of free resources to be used in the classroom, online and at their local green space. The free resources are clearly mapped to the primary science curriculum for England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales.

Throughout 2009 primary schools wishing to carry out the Great Plant Hunt activities may approach your site as their local green space. Why not have a look at the curriculum activities and invite schools to come to you? All the activities are designed to be hands-on and easy to run.

‘Register as friend’ on the Great Plant Hunt website and be the first to find out when the new website goes live!

www.kew.org/greatplanthunt

New website with fully downloadable resources from March 2009. See how you can support schools at your site!

Engaging with families...

Thinking Walks complement The Great Plant Hunt, and offer families and the young at heart a chance to get involved with the project at their local green space.

Taking a walk on his specially-created ‘Thinking Path’ was an important part of Charles Darwin’s daily routine when he lived at Down House in Kent. He used this daily walk as a chance to ponder questions that were raised by his observations and research. Darwin also enjoyed feeling and seeing the changes in seasons and weather as he strolled.

Download the free and editable resources for organising and creating your own Thinking Walk - including pre-designed boards, templates for telling the stories specific to your site, press release info and extra activities to complement the walks. See the ‘Organise a Thinking Walk’ web section for more info.

Advertise your Thinking Walk on the Darwin200 website and become part of the Darwin celebrations!

www.kew.org/thinking-walk

If you'd like your visitors to follow in Darwin's footsteps... take them on a Thinking Walk!

The Darwin200 secretariat is supported by: