



Darwin as an Example – Natural History Museums and Botanical Gardens speak out for scientific authenticity and warn about hostility against science

On the occasion of Charles Darwins 200th birthday on the 12th of February 2009 the large natural history museums and botanic gardens stress their commitment to the authentic presentation of science and research as well as their disapproval of any hostility against science. They oppose pseudoscientific creationism as well as science transgressing its own competence. It is their aim to communicate the fascination of evolution and its importance for the sustainable management of the earth's resources to the public.

Charles Darwin himself is a shining example for the natural history museums and botanic gardens. His epoch-making work “On the Origin of Species” derives from hypotheses he developed on the basis of his observations and collections from his voyage on the Beagle. To support them Darwin studied additional material, made breeding experiments and used additional observations. He also tested theories from other scientific disciplines and combined all these findings to his comprehensive theory of evolution. After careful consideration he published his work stating himself the potential falsification points of his theory and being well aware of the rejection with which it would probably meet in society. He endured the malice to which he was exposed and spent the rest of his life accumulating evidence to support his theory of evolution and communicating this theory. In doing so he always stayed within the realm of science. He did not take part in the ideological exaggerations and social darwinistic alienations of his theory that followed. Due to his careful work the fundamental principles of his theory of evolution are valid to this day.

Today, the theory of evolution faces increasing ideological hostility, overinterpretation and misuse even in Germany. The natural history museums and botanic gardens linked in the “Deutsche naturwissenschaftliche Forschungssammlungen (DNFS) (German Natural Science Research Collections)” and their partners affirm their commitment to present evolution as authentic and comprehensive as possible. For their exhibitions and research they largely rely on verifiable original objects. The collections of the DNFS with more than 100 million objects are a vast amount of empirical evidence supporting the evolution of the Cosmos, the Earth and the life on Earth.

The modern biological theory of evolution is the best current explanation for the development of life and it is the only scientific one. It is supported and constantly developed further by a variety of scientific methods and empirical evidence.

The natural sciences deal with the question “how does nature work, what are the relevant mechanisms?” They cannot answer questions concerning the meaning of life. As long as religion and science both stay in their own realm they do not exclude each other because they work on different levels. However, religious beliefs can have no place in a scientific analysis of life. For that reason the DNFS categorically disapprove of creationism and its derivative, intelligent design. Creationist beliefs are not science because they can neither be verified nor falsified. Moreover,

creationism is not only hostile to science but also to modern theological interpretations and it tries to gain influence in society and politics.

Evolution is a continuous process still ongoing today and well documented by fossils and recent samples in museums and collections. Today's biodiversity is the result of this process. The theory of evolution is crucial for the sustainable management of biological resources and the benefit of mankind.

The German natural history museums and botanic gardens support research on evolution in their collections and they themselves take part in it a great deal. Through exhibitions and additional public activities they promote the presentation and communication of evolution in the public. They place themselves under the following obligations: to distinguish clearly between validated evidence and statements that are still in the process of scientific debate; not to draw inadmissible ideological conclusions from scientific findings; to present evolution, science and scientific methods in a clear and comprehensive way.

The DNFS, 10TH February 2009

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The DNFS website: www.dnfs.de

Events organized by DNFS members and their partners in the Darwin year:
www.darwinjahr2009.de

This position statement of the DNFS is linked to the following similar declarations, for example the Buffon Declaration by 93 big natural history institutions, the declaration of the International Committee for museums and collections of natural history or the European network ECSITE.

Buffon Declaration: <http://www.dnfs.de/pdfs/BuffonDeclaration30oct2007.pdf>

ICOM-NATHIST Position Statement: <http://www.icom-nathist.de/icom/fpe.htm>

ECSITE Position Statement: <http://www.ecsite-uk.net/about/downloads/ecsite-position-statement-on-science.pdf>

The current members of the DNFS are:

Botanic Garden and Botanical museum Berlin-Dahlem

Senckenberg Research Institute and Natural History Museum

Museum for Natural History Berlin

Zoological Collections of the University of Hamburg

Bavarian Natural History Collections

Natural History Museum Stuttgart (Staatliches Museum für Naturkunde Stuttgart)

Natural History Museum Karlsruhe (Staatliches Museum für Naturkunde Karlsruhe)

Zoological Research Museum Alexander König

This statement has been posted at www.dnfs.de