

Celebration of Charles Darwin's Anniversaries in Estonia

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Understanding of the evolution of biodiversity is a key to the understanding of the interactions of living systems in our planet.

Already in the 19th Century, "The Origin of Species" was translated into several languages, including Danish, Dutch, French, German, Italian, Russian and Swedish. The translations to Lithuanian (1953) and Latvian (1959) followed much later. The publication of the translation of "The Origin of Species" to Estonian has been waiting for too long. Estonian Naturalists' Society is planning to publish it in November, 2009, for the 150th anniversary of its publication in the series of "Classics of Natural Sciences". In 2006, Charles Darwin's "Autobiography" translated after Nora Barlow's version from 1958, was published in the same series. The translator of both works is a biologist Mart Niklus, who prepared the manuscripts of the translation already in 1958–1962. Except for the English original texts, he found the comments of the Russian translations very useful and corresponded with Professor Sergey L. Sobol', the translator of Darwin's "Autobiography" and "Voyage of the Beagle". Due to an unexpected turn of fate in 1958, Mart Niklus, an amateur photographer, whose realistic photos of some places in Tartu published abroad did not please the censors, had to carry out most of this work as a political prisoner in the Mordva prison camp. Still, he was allowed to spend a great part of his time with the translation and even to correspond with the experts and libraries. Partly due to this personal history, the publishers declined to publish his manuscripts for a long time. Only after "perestroika" and further developments, these translations were found to be useful for educating the society. However, with time, the Estonian biological terminology had developed, and it was found that these texts need a thorough editing. This difficult editing work was undertaken by a geneticist Mart Viikmaa, with some assistance of a palaeontologist Ivar Puura.

In February, 2009, a popular scientific journal "Eesti Loodus" ("Estonian Nature"), published a special issue on Charles Darwin. The articles on Darwin included a brief account of Darwin's life and work ("Charles Darwin and His 'Dangerous Idea'", by Ivar Puura), articles "Charles Darwin as a Geologist" (by Liisa Lang, Liina Laumets and Tõnu Meidla), "How the Development of an Individual Can Affect Evolution" (by Scott Gilbert), "The Adoption of Darwin's Ideas in Estonia" (by Ken Kalling and Erki Tammiksaar), a paper on Darwin's experiments with *Drosera* ("The Carnivore Bog Plant that Inspired Darwin", by Sirje Aher), "Darwin and Orchids" (by Tiit Kull), an essay on Darwinism (by Tarmo Timm) and an interview on the principles of evolutionism with Mart Viikmaa. A review of the most recent approach to the tree of life of the Eukaryotes (by Marko Prou) also fitted well to this thematic issue. The English summaries are available in the address http://www.loodusajakiri.ee/est_i_loodus/artikkel2718_2686.html.

To celebrate the 200th Anniversary of Charles Darwin's birth on February, 12, 2009, the University of Tartu and the Estonian Academy of Sciences co-organised the conference "Biodiversity and Evolution". The conference was opened by the Rector of the University, Professor Alar Karis and the Ambassador of the Great Britain, His Excellency Peter Carter. The plenary session in English included the talks of the foreign member of Estonian Academy of Science,

Professor Emeritus of the Uppsala University Charles Kurland (“Protein Evolution: the Container and the Contained”) and the professors of the University of Tartu, Mairo Remm (“What is the Sequence of the Human Genome?”) and Urmas Kõljalg (“Biodiversity Informatics and the Understanding of Species 200 years after the Birth of Charles Darwin”). After lunch, the conference was concluded by a panel discussion in Estonian “Key Questions of Biodiversity and Evolution in the 21st Century”, with five university professors as the panelists. Interested readers can access the videos of the conference talks at <http://www.ut.ee/525156>. This conference, attended by 130 people and transferred via Internet, was one event in the series of the educational events of the UNESCO Year of the Planet Earth (2007–2009).

On May, 29–31, many aspects of Charles Darwin’s heritage were discussed in the 35th Spring School of Theoretical Biology, “Theory of Descent” held at Karilatsi, near Tartu, attended by 60 people interested in theoretical biology. Spring schools of theoretical biology have been held every spring since 1974.

Other events include lectures on evolution by international lecturers, several articles in newspapers, events in universities, schools, and public events for various target groups in nature centres, botanical gardens and the zoo. Some further public events and exhibitions will be organized in connection with the 150th anniversary of “The Origin of Species” and the presentation of its Estonian translation in November.

During these events, except for the facts and ideas documented by Charles Darwin, new ideas shaping the evolutionary biology of the 21st Century are discussed, with an emphasis to the ideas of Karl Ernst von Baer and evolutionary developmental biology (evo-devo), and developments in ecological developmental biology. With this rather wide spectrum of events and publications, Estonia has recognized the relevance of the Year of Darwin as the Year of Evolution.

Празднование Дарвиновских годовщин в Эстонии

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Данный обзор посвящен мероприятиям, связанным с Дарвиновскими годовщинами, в Эстонии. Особое внимание уделено публикации перевода «Происхождения видов» на эстонский язык, планируемой на ноябрь 2009 г. В феврале 2009 г. вышел номер журнала «Эстонская природа», посвященный Дарвину, его биографии и научной деятельности. 12 февраля открылась конференция «Биоразнообразии и эволюция», организованная Университетом Тарту совместно с Эстонской академией наук, в которой участвовали и иностранные исследователи. 29–31 мая прошла 35-я Весенняя школа теоретической биологии, посвященная теме «Теория происхождения». Среди других событий — лекции по эволюции, публикации в периодической печати, различные выставки, посвященные Дарвину, теории эволюции и книге «Происхождение видов». Эстония признает значение года Дарвина как года эволюции.