

RESEARCH

Co-discoverer of evolution and Singapore

For the first time, lesser known co-discoverer of the theory of evolution, Alfred Russel Wallace gets his well-deserved recognition by having his complete works available online.



Dr John van Wyhe (middle) with Professor Andrew Wee, Dean of Faculty of Science (left) and Professor Gregory Clancey, Master, Tembusu College, NUS University Town (right) at the launch of Wallace Online.

Did you know that Southeast Asia was the birthplace of evolution, and not the Galapagos Islands?

Back in 1854, British naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace began his research in the biodiversity of Southeast Asia. Using Singapore as his base, he did extensive research throughout the region observing the distribution and habits of local wildlife and discovering hundreds of new species. In total he and his assistants collected 125,000 specimens of insects, birds and animals.

The specimens that Wallace collected were pivotal in inspiring him to understand how species become adapted to their natural environments by process of natural selection. The theory was first published in a joint paper together with Charles Darwin in July 1858.

Recognition and access to Wallace's works

Wallace has never enjoyed the fame and reputation of Darwin and access to his many publications, scattered over hundreds of newspapers, magazine and journals, has been impossible.

Darwin had his complete works edited, digitalised and published on the website, *Darwin Online*, in 2006 by Dr John van Wyhe, then at the University of Cambridge. In 2009, upon being appointed as Senior Lecturer at the NUS Department of Biological Sciences, Dr van Wyhe and his assistant Dr Kees Rookmaaker began to work on *Wallace Online*, which has for the first time published the complete works of Wallace and a large collection of additional material.

Dr van Wyhe said "Wallace is an outstanding example of someone who had no privilege, no wealth, no connections - and who went out to make his own way in the world. He learned to study and think independently. He discovered many amazing things about living things, not just evolution and he did so with modesty and good humour. That's why he remains such an inspiring figure for so many people."

Taking 3 years to complete the website, *Wallace Online* was launched on 27 September 2012 at Tembusu College, University Town.

The big Wallace year

Made possible by an anonymous grant from an American donor, the free site offers 29,000 pages of documents and 26,000 images. It contains everything from Wallace's first tentative scientific contribution to a journal to his full range of scientific books. Most of them have been out of print for decades.

The year 2013 is the centenary of Wallace's death, so the website is timely for researchers to access his life's work together with thousands of illustrations and scientific descriptions of his specimens from South East Asia.

"Just like 2009 was the big Darwin year, 2013 will be the big Wallace year. And I hope now that people have access to all of his writings, it will make a big difference to what people say and write about him." Said Dr John van Wyhe.

Now, you will be able to access all the works of this founding father of biodiversity online at <http://wallace-online.org>.

© Dean's Office | Text: Sarah Loke



Some examples of the wildlife which Wallace collected in Singapore included the butterfly *Elymnias undularis* (bottom left) and the Asian Fairy-bluebird (top right).

Website:

<http://www.science.nus.edu.sg/alumni/omniscience>

EDITORS

Sarah Loke
Email: scilwms@nus.edu.sg

DESIGNER

Angela Lim

DEAN

Professor Andrew Wee

ADVISORS

Associate Professor Chin Wee Shong
Vice Dean (Outreach & Student Life)

Priscilla Soh
Senior Associate Director (HR and Admin)

Dean's Office

Faculty of Science
Block S16 Level 2
6 Science Drive 2, S(117546)

All information is correct at the time of circulation. Faculty of Science reserves the right to make changes and modifications to the contributions submitted without prior notice. The views and opinions expressed by individual contributors do not represent the positions of Faculty of Science, NUS.