



# Wallace immortalised

Museum set to receive Wallace statue 100 years later than planned

Towards the end of his life, Alfred Russel Wallace, co-discoverer of the theory of evolution by natural selection with Charles Darwin, was one of the most famous scientists in the world. When he died in November 1913, plans were soon underway to produce a statue of him for the Natural History Museum, but within only a few months this scheme was scuppered by World War 1. One hundred years later there is still not a single statue of him anywhere. Director of the Wallace Correspondence Project, **Dr George Beccaloni**, picks up the story.

Most people have heard of Charles Darwin, but Wallace's name is not so well known these days. Yet he independently originated the theory of evolution by natural selection, which he published jointly with Darwin in 1858. A great seeker after truth, he made a massive contribution to science, publishing more than 1,000 articles and 22 books.

He also made many other significant contributions to fields as diverse as glaciology, land reform, anthropology, ethnography, epidemiology and astrobiology. He is known as the 'father of biogeography' due to his pioneering work on the study of how plants and animals are distributed. Garlanded with all kinds of awards, including the Order of Merit – the highest civilian award in the UK – yet today his memory has faded.

## OUT OF THE SHADOWS

Over the decades, Darwin has come to overshadow Wallace ever more completely. There are hundreds of Darwin statues and busts, but not a single one of his friend and contemporary. Surprised to find so little to mark or celebrate the works of such an eminent scientist who contributed so much to our understanding of the natural world, in 2011 I decided to start a campaign to raise funds for a statue of him. Part of the Wallace100 project, which commemorates the centenary of Wallace's death, it will help to remind people about his life and work.

Anthony Smith, a zoology graduate turned sculptor, was chosen to sculpt the piece and it was agreed that it would be made in solid bronze, at the rather daunting cost of £50,000. Fundraising began in July last year under the auspices of the Wallace Memorial Fund, with the enthusiastic support of the Fund's Patron,

comedian Bill Bailey and its Treasurer, Wallace's grandson Richard.

## WHAT WILL IT LOOK LIKE?

Wallace will be depicted as he was while collecting in the rainforests of what he called the Malay Archipelago (Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia). He spent almost eight years, between March 1854 and April 1862, travelling and collecting beetles, butterflies, birds and other natural history specimens in this vast, poorly explored region. Afterwards he regarded the trip as the defining period of his life. It was there he discovered natural selection. He collected an astonishing 126,000 specimens, including thousands new to science. Perhaps 70 per cent of these are now preserved in the Museum's collection.

A lot of work has been done to ensure the statue is as authentic in its representation of Wallace as is possible. Only a single

photograph of Wallace survives from this period, taken in Singapore in February 1862, and unfortunately it is rather blurry. Luckily we also have a very high-quality photo of him, taken a few years later in about 1869, and as he doesn't seem to have changed, the head of the statue will largely be based on this image.

## CLOTHING AND COLLECTING GEAR

In the Singapore photo, Wallace is wearing his smart city clothes – not what he would have worn while out collecting – so his field attire had to be deduced from other clues. One source is an illustration in his famous book *The Malay Archipelago* in which he is wearing an open-necked shirt, a wide-brimmed hat and white trousers. Other clues are found in the text of this book, where he writes 'I escaped [leeches] myself, by wearing my worsted socks over my trousers, and kept in their place by boots laced up over them'.

The best description of his clothing and insect collecting equipment comes from a letter he wrote while in Sarawak in 1855. 'My equipment is a rug-net [bag-net], large collecting-box hung by a strap over my shoulder, a pair of pliers for Hymenoptera [ants, bees and wasps], two bottles with spirits, one large and wide-mouthed for average Coleoptera [beetles], the other very small for minute and active insects, which are often

lost by attempting to drop them into a large mouthed bottle. These bottles are carried in pockets in my hunting-shirt, and are attached by strings round my neck; the corks are each secured to the bottle by a short string.'

After considerable research I tracked down the design of the hunting-shirt mentioned. It was worn by English gentlemen while out hunting and shooting, and was unusual in that it had pockets, which most mid-Victorian shirts lacked.

The large collecting-box Wallace referred to was a cork-lined tin box, into which he pinned butterflies and other delicate winged insects to carry them back home without damage.

## THE GRAND UNVEILING

The statue will be sited near the Wildlife Garden outside the Museum's Darwin Centre, a building that contains many thousands of Wallace's insect specimens. It will be publically unveiled by Sir David Attenborough on the centenary of Wallace's death – 7 November – in a long-awaited and fitting tribute to one of the greatest scientific figures in history.

In the next issue of *evolve* we hear from sculptor Anthony Smith on how the statue was designed and the challenges of turning a clay sculpture into bronze.

## Discover more...

>> More information about the Wallace Fund's statue campaign, including how to contribute, go to [www.wallacefund.info/statue](http://www.wallacefund.info/statue)

>> Join Richard Dawkins, Bill Bailey, Richard Fortey and others at the ExCel Conference Centre for a fundraising event in aid of the Wallace statue appeal on 16 November. Further details can be found at [www.entangled-bank.co.uk/upcoming-events](http://www.entangled-bank.co.uk/upcoming-events)

>> Information about the unveiling of the Wallace statue is available on the Museum's website at [www.nhm.ac.uk/wallace100](http://www.nhm.ac.uk/wallace100)

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**Left** Wallace in 1869. **Below from left to right** Woodcut from Wallace's book *The Malay Archipelago* showing him wearing an open-necked shirt, a wide-brimmed hat and white trousers. Wallace and his friend Frederick Geach in Singapore, February 1862. Early stage in sculpting the statue.

