

# Endless Forms Most Beautiful and Most Wonderful

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It has been a pleasure to serve as guest editor of this issue of *Evolution: Education & Outreach*. Editors-in-Chief Niles and Greg Eldredge and Managing Editor Mick Wycoff showed enormous support for my efforts to solicit and identify the highest quality submissions and to develop each to its potential. The professionals at Springer made it easy for editors and authors alike to focus on scholarship. Referees, drawn from an impressive pool of teachers and researchers across many disciplines, exemplified the dignity that is rightly accorded to the ideal of peer review as a safeguard against bias and as a mechanism of the kind of cooperation and community input that is so important to the success of the scientific method.

## Hooray for Issue #1!

The first issue of *Evolution: Education & Outreach* has been a success. At the journal's launch at the late November meeting of the National Association of Biology Teachers, our editors quickly gave away more than 2,000 copies of issue #1. The editorial staff will distribute free copies of the latest issue at many upcoming conferences of interest to our readers, such as the April 2008 meeting of the Federation of Societies of Experimental Biology. The journal's success in print is

exceeded by its Internet success. There have been more than 10,000 downloads from issue #1's online electronic copy. Visit the journal's Internet home at Springer at <http://www.springer.com/west/home/generic/search/results?SGWID=4-40109-70-173740503-0> for general journal information and a prominent link to digital copies of issues #1 and #2, the entire contents of which are available online free of charge to anyone. Alternatively, online content may be viewed directly at <http://www.springerlink.com/content/120878/>. Springer intends to offer the full contents of volumes 1 and 2 free online; depending upon the success of those volumes and funding support, the full contents of later volumes may also be offered online for free.

Our home page has not been the only frequent destination for our readers, who have made their presence known on the social networking web sites [Myspace.com](http://www.myspace.com) and [Facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com). Journal editors, contributors, and their colleagues post news items, photos, and links to related sites and other profiles in the MySpace and Facebook networks. As well, each *Evolution: Education & Outreach* profile page hosts lively discussion among community members, who also use the space to announce conferences, publications, internships, and other groups and web sites likely to be of interest to our readers. MySpace users are warmly invited to visit us at [http://www.myspace.com/springer\\_evo](http://www.myspace.com/springer_evo), and Facebook users should certainly make it a point to drop by <http://facebook.com/group.php?gid=23672835224> (Facebook users will be asked to log in to view the site, which requires a Facebook account). Visitors to either site are encouraged to add the journal's profile as a friend (MySpace) or join the group (Facebook).

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An additional measure of our success is that there has been a sharp increase in the number of submissions. Those wishing to contribute are encouraged to visit our editorial manager web site at <https://www.editorialmanager.com/evoo/>. Contributions of all types are welcome, including research articles, personal reflections, reviews, and curriculum materials.

### *Reflections on this Issue*

Issue #1 presents a tough act to follow. Nonetheless, I have confidence that all those who appreciated issue #1 will not be disappointed in the least with issue #2, which delivers a similar mix of research, curriculum materials, essays, and reviews, all of which meet the high standard of excellence established in the previous issue. Two characteristics of this issue of *Evolution: Education & Outreach* are particularly striking: the broad approach of this issue's contributors and the number of contributions aimed at directing readers to quality information resources.

**A broad effort** As is appropriate for the subject of evolution—whose theme is diversity and diversification—the contributions to this issue take a wide range of approaches to a wide range of topics. For instance, Niles Eldredge, Borsari, and Thomson's work concerns paleontology, whereas Rybarczyk and Jenkins address present-day evolutionary phenomena. Taken as a group, these contributions treat evolution among higher taxa, molecular evolution, and within-population evolution of lineages of organisms—a variety of types of evolving entities and levels of evolution. The particular organisms treated by this issue's authors fall across a range of taxa, including the AIDS virus, Precambrian creatures near the roots of the tree of life, the mastodon, and—last but not least—human beings. Some contributors approach evolution from perspectives outside science entirely. For example, Richards takes the view of a historian and philosopher of science; Borsari brings evolutionary themes into students' sculpture and printmaking studios; Mick Wycoff reports on Esther Solondz's installation depicting important evolutionists; and Depew describes the value to the classroom of *Inherit the Wind*. Horenstein shows how New York building construction, the history of dentistry and medicine, and the economics of museums can be used to focus attention on the evolution of the mastodon. My own contribution takes the form of a bibliographic essay.

The take-home lesson here is that no one strategy or central insight provides the key to understanding evolution. Evolution has far-reaching consequences for the natural world and for our understanding of our place in it; identifying and explaining those consequences requires all forms of human expression. A striking argument, the explanation of an adaptation or an evolutionary history, or an exemplary proof of the occurrence of evolution is useless to someone who lacks a proper context for it. I hope that future contributors to *Evolution: Education & Outreach* provide pathways to understanding evolution as diverse as the contributors to the present issue have.

**The flood of information** Suppose that all information available online and in print concerning evolution were *correct*. This would certainly be fortunate. Nonetheless, even in this ideal situation, most questions about evolution would go unanswered: Many correct information sources fail to *inform* because they lack relevance for the inquirer's context. People seeking information do so for a particular purpose or with a particular inquiry in mind, and there is so much information available in the world's libraries and on the Internet—more and more, these two are becoming identical—that even experts cannot possibly consider a small fraction of the full range of sources that may be relevant to their questions. The idealization that all information available online and in print concerning evolution is correct is nowhere near being realized, so that the problem of information access is a serious one. This is what is meant by claiming that there is a *flood of information* about evolution. Before beginning to identify the relevant sources among the good ones, a researcher must first eliminate those of no help to anyone.

Extending the diluvial metaphor, many of the contributions to this issue of *Evolution: Education & Outreach* are aimed at damming the flood of information to create a reservoir of accurate and useful information resources. As he did in issue #1, Sid Horenstein has put together our “In the News” section, pointing readers to news media sources about current events in evolutionary studies. In future issues, look for “In the News” to solicit news items from a wide range of sources among working evolutionists, focus on special topics from issue to issue, highlight web sites and other multimedia news sources, and offer critical appraisal of news coverage of evolutionary science.

This issue also begins a regular section of book reviews. These include Jenkins and Fail's reviews of

important works by Jared Diamond; Finkelman's reviews of some recent philosophical works about evolution; and Hammond's review of D. S. Wilson's *Evolution for Everyone*. Future issues of *Evolution: Education & Outreach* will offer an expanded reviews section, directing readers to quality Internet and multimedia resources as well as books. This will supplement the reviews of museums, museum installations, and other cultural phenomena related to evolution that are already a part of *Evolution: Education & Outreach*, as seen in Whitson's review in issue #1 of the American Museum of Natural History's Hall of Human Origins.

### *Endless Forms Most Beautiful*

Darwin concludes *The Origin of Species* eloquently: "from so simple a beginning, endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved." I hope that from its beginnings in this first volume, *Evolution: Education & Outreach* will continue to evolve forms most beautiful and wonderful: forms of argument and evidence; forms of access to information; and in general all forms of communication and expression that will promote understanding of evolution and its consequences.