

World's biggest collection of Darwin's work comes to the Natural History Museum

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The largest, most comprehensive collection of books by and about Darwin ever assembled has been acquired by the Natural History Museum. Known as the Kohler Darwin collection, it includes nearly everything Darwin published from 1829 onwards.

At £985,000 it is the biggest collection purchase made in the Museum's 125-year history, and was made possible through a grant of £712,000 from the National Heritage Memorial Fund as well as contributions from individual donors, trusts and charities.

"This acquisition makes the Museum the ultimate Darwin resource." said Richard Lane, Science Director at the Natural History Museum. "Darwin brought about a revolution in how humans think about themselves and the natural world. Combining this collection with our existing holdings gives us an unprecedented insight into how the theory of evolution developed, and how Darwin worked.

"Charles Darwin's importance in the development of science is unquestioned. His role in our understanding of the workings of nature continues to this day" said Carole Souter, Director of the National Heritage Memorial Fund. 'We're delighted to have helped save this outstanding collection for the nation to enjoy for many generations to come."

The collection joins the many Darwin specimens already held by the Museum, including those collected while on the famous Beagle voyage. Bringing together the books and specimens will enable scientists to build their understanding of these specimens and how they were collected and studied. The Kohler Darwin collection also adds to the Museum's existing library of books by Darwin's contemporaries, such as Alfred Russell Wallace, forming an extraordinary resource on the theory of evolution.

Assembled over 20 years, the Kohler Darwin collection comprises almost 3500 items in total. There are copies of nearly all editions, issues and bindings of Darwin's publications, including a wide foreign language selection. These are complemented by a number of autograph letters by Darwin and his peers, and a range of other printed and original material that trace how our understanding of evolution grew through the 20th century.

Highlights of the collection that the Museum has acquired include:

- First edition of *On the Origin of Species* presentation copy and the accompanying handwritten letter that Darwin sent to W. B. Tegetmeier, a poultry expert, pigeon fancier and naturalist who helped Darwin with his studies,
- *Himalayan Journals* by Joseph Dalton Hooker, Darwin's colleague and confidant, which Hooker presented to his son together with a letter to Hooker from a young admirer,
- A rare copy of *Zoology of the Voyage of HMS Beagle*, bound in original cloth in three volumes,
- Map of the Falkland Islands from the Beagle voyage,
- 470 different editions of *On the Origin of Species* in 28 languages plus Braille, which is more than have ever been brought together before.

Antiquarian booksellers Chris and Michèle Kohler pieced the collection together with over 1,200 purchases. Initially a small collection of evolution books, it developed into a mission to assemble the greatest Darwin collection ever. The books occupied four rooms in their home before being purchased by the Museum.

"Darwin constantly reworked his ideas, and these continual changes can only be seen if all the books are in one place," said Chris Kohler. "After investing two decades assembling this vast collection, we are delighted that it will be accessible to study far into the future."

Over the next 3 years the collection will be catalogued, conserved and re-housed. During this time it will be available to visiting researchers at the Museum. Items from the collection will form a part of the Darwin exhibition that the Museum is hosting in autumn 2008.

Notes to editors

Winner of the 2006 Independent award for the UK's favourite museum, gallery or heritage attraction at the Museum and Heritage Awards for Excellence, the Natural History Museum is also a world-leading science research centre. Through its collections and scientific expertise, the Museum is helping to conserve the extraordinary richness and diversity of the natural world with groundbreaking projects in 68 countries.

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