



THE NEW YORK BOTANICAL GARDEN

For Immediate Release
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Darwin's Garden: An Evolutionary Adventure

April 25–July 20, 2008

Exhibition in the LuEsther T. Mertz Library Presents Darwin's Life with Plants

The cornerstone of *Darwin's Garden: An Evolutionary Adventure* will be a scholarly exhibition of visually stunning botanical prints and Charles Darwin's original writings, field notebooks, and plant collections. This exhibition of 62 rare books and objects will be displayed in the William D. Rondina and Giovanni Foroni LoFaro Gallery of the LuEsther T. Mertz Library, the world's largest botanical and horticultural library. It will reveal how Darwin came to be an evolutionary botanist and will show how his interest in plants integrated with his most fundamental contribution to science: a comprehensive view of life. The exhibition will be displayed from April 25 through July 20, 2008.

The Mertz Library exhibition will explore Darwin's interest in plants through biographic and thematic approaches. Illustrated books, manuscripts, and other published materials from the Mertz Library's extensive collection of *Darwiniana* will form the greater part of the exhibition, with additional materials on loan from the collections of private individuals and institutions such as the Cambridge Herbarium, Cambridge University Library, Down House, the archives and library of the Gray Herbarium of Harvard University, and the Lindley Library of the Royal Horticultural Society.

To the Garden Born: Darwin's Botanical Heritage

Botany played a pivotal—and often unappreciated—role in every phase of Darwin's life. His fascination with travel and the nature, variability, and geography of species, as well as his later preoccupations with plant sexuality and sensitivity, arose from the deep personal relationship to plants that took root in childhood. His own flowering as a botanist and naturalist was in no small measure influenced by family history and early upbringing. Even the earliest portrait of Darwin depicts the young future scientist with his sister, embracing a potted plant in full flower. A reproduction of this chalk drawing will be in the exhibition. His paternal grandfather, Erasmus, a physician, botanist, and poet, penned *The Botanic Garden* (first published in 1789), a wide-ranging poem on science, technology, and the fertilization of plants; its humor, sensitivity, and skillful use of heroic couplets were said to influence the works of Coleridge, Wordsworth, Keats, and Shelley. Darwin's maternal uncle John Wedgwood, son of famed potter Josiah, conceived and founded the Royal Horticultural Society.

New research by exhibition curator David Kohn and Cambridge University's John Parker, head of the *Darwin's Garden* Advisory Committee, suggests Darwin's exposure to key ideas of 18th- and early 19th-century botany during his undergraduate education at Edinburgh and Cambridge had a profound impact on his evolutionary thinking (Kohn, Murrell, Parker & Whitehouse 2005).

Darwin's notes as a medical student in Edinburgh and his plant anatomical dissections while a student at Cambridge will be on display, as well as early herbarium sheets that he studied.

- more -

- Darwin and the Foundations of Evolutionary Biology

Deeply moved by the balance of life and death in the entangled vegetation of tropical Brazil and Tierra del Fuego during the five-year circumnavigation of the HMS *Beagle*, Darwin spent much of the journey collecting plants along with fossil bones and bird skins. In the Galápagos, he was struck by the unique island species, and his collection of “all plants in flower” formed the basis for the first flora of that archipelago. The *Beagle* voyage blessed Darwin with an expanded view of natural processes, launching him on a decades-long journey of the mind that led to the writing of *On the Origin of Species*, where he first published his ideas on evolution.

In the exhibition, a facsimile page of Darwin's diary aboard the *Beagle* will show his reaction upon his first encounter with a tropical forest. Flower drawings painted on the voyage and a massive synoptic view of nature's distribution over the Earth will vividly evoke early 19th-century views of nature. Darwin's plant notes from the voyage and a sample herbarium sheet of a plant he collected in the Galápagos will reflect the dawning of his own theory of evolution.

After his return, Darwin transformed the gardens and countryside surrounding his Down House villa into a botanical field station. Botany proved to be crucial to the creation of the *Origin*; many of its critical arguments were tested by botanical experiments. Darwin also drew upon a deep familiarity with botanical literature he had acquired over the two decades after the *Beagle* voyage. While Darwin kept his theory largely a private, almost secret, preoccupation during this period, he did form strong collegial friendships with two leading botanists: Joseph Dalton Hooker, Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, and Asa Gray of Harvard University. Sustained by the intellectual and material support of these friends, Darwin was ready, within months of the *Origin*'s publication in 1859, to apply evolution to the specifically botanical phenomena he had first encountered as a young student. His explanation of how evolution produces biodiversity—the principle of divergence, heredity and variation, and his ideas on the origin and function of sex—springs from his scholarship, botanical experimentation, and intellectual exchange with friends, all of which *Darwin's Garden* will explore in the Mertz Library.

The exhibition will include Darwin's *Experiment Book*, which contains several of his botanical experiments and a page on his “weed garden,” and a facsimile manuscript of *Trees of Life*, Darwin's metaphor for evolutionary relationships over time. Color photography, further herbarium specimens, engravings, and line drawings will vividly illustrate Darwin's studies of flower form and pollination.

Darwinia Display in the Rare Book Room

In the Rare Book Room's showcase inside the Mertz Library, additional Darwin materials will be on display during the Darwin exhibition in the gallery. The case will highlight items from the Mertz Library's Cox Collection, including a rare statue of Darwin, unpublished illustrations, family genealogy, and a bit about the writings of Erasmus Darwin, Charles' illustrious grandfather. The Cox Collection began with the collection of Charles Finney Cox (1846–1912), one of the original members of the Botanical Garden's Board of Managers, who served as Treasurer of the Board from 1899 until his death. Cox was greatly interested in the life and work of Charles Darwin and formed one of the most complete private collections of Darwiniana. In 1912, a permanent memorial to Cox was established to purchase for the Library his substantial collection of books, pamphlets, and letters relating to Darwin.

Scholarly Catalog and Guided Tours

The Botanical Garden is publishing an illustrated catalog of the exhibition's contents, including a scholarly essay by exhibition curator and Darwin historian David Kohn and a checklist of all items in the show, as a guide for visitors and as an enduring reference. The scholarly essay chronicles the importance of botany throughout Charles Darwin's life and reveals the little-known dimension of his influential work. Informative text, which includes fascinating anecdotes on the development of his theory of evolution by natural selection, accompanies beautiful images of many of the rare books and prints in the exhibition, illustrating the plants that Darwin studied with original material of his own writings and collections. The

catalog also includes a-foldout of the Tree of Life and descriptions of the other components of the *Darwin's Garden* exhibition.

Guided tours of the exhibition will also be scheduled periodically during the exhibition. The schedule of tours will be available via the Botanical Garden's Web site at www.nybg.org

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*Spring Season sponsored by **MetLife Foundation***

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The New York Botanical Garden is a museum of plants located at Bronx River Parkway (Exit 7W) and Fordham Road. During *Darwin's Garden: An Evolutionary Adventure*, the Botanical Garden will be open Tuesday through Sunday and Monday federal holidays from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. For more information, please call 718.817.8700 or visit www.nybg.org

The best way to enjoy *Darwin's Garden* is with the *All-Garden Pass*, which includes admission to the grounds as well as to the exhibitions, Enid A. Haupt Conservatory, Everett Children's Adventure Garden, Rock and Native Plant Gardens, Tram Tour, and Evolutionary Tour: \$20 for adults, \$18 for seniors and students with ID, \$7 for children ages 2–12, children under 2 are free. Order tickets for *Darwin's Garden* in advance at www.nybg.org

Admission to the two-part evening symposium, *Darwin: 21st-Century Perspectives*, on May 6 and 8 is separate: \$10 for a single session or \$16 for both. Registration is required; please call 800.322.6924 to order tickets for the symposium.

A *Grounds-Only Pass* to the Botanical Garden is also available: \$6 for adults, \$5 for adult Bronx Residents; \$3 for seniors, \$2 for students with ID, \$1 for children ages 2–12, children under 2 are free. Grounds-only admission is free all day on Wednesdays and from 10 a.m. to noon on Saturdays.

On Tuesdays and Thursdays, April 25–June 15, 4–6 p.m., admission to The New York Botanical Garden is complimentary, courtesy of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

The New York Botanical Garden is located on property owned in full by the City of New York, and its operation is made possible in part by public funds provided through the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs. A portion of the Garden's general operating funds is provided by The New York City Council and The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. The Bronx Borough President and Bronx elected representatives in the City Council and State Legislature provide leadership funding.

Media Contact: George Shakespeare 718.817.8512 or gshakespeare@nybg.org