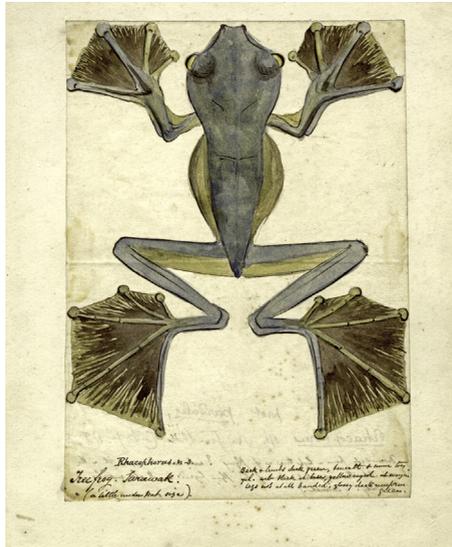


# A “Central and Controlling Incident”: Celebrating *The Malay Archipelago* and the Intellectual Legacy of Alfred Russel Wallace



**Thursday 07 November 2019**  
**09:30–17:30**

2019 is the 150th anniversary of Alfred Russel Wallace’s landmark travel memoir *The Malay Archipelago*, chronicling his eight years of exploration in Southeast Asia — the watershed experience that he later famously called “the central and controlling incident of my life”. This day meeting celebrates the legacy of Wallace’s “central and controlling incident” exploring his interests and what they mean for us today.

# PROGRAMME

## **9:30–9:50 — REGISTRATION**

9:50–10:00 — Opening Remarks/ Introduction by the Linnean Society

## **10:00–12:00 — MORNING SESSION**

10.00–10.20 — Richard Milner; *Worlds within worlds: Wallace's life arc as revealed in eight decades of letters*

10.20–10.40 — Andrew Berry, "A very bad hand at writing anything like narrative": *Seven years to write up eight years of travel in the Malay Archipelago*

10.40–11.00 — James T. Costa; *Alfred Russel Wallace's biogeographic vision in space and time*

## **11.00–11.20 — Tea/Coffee Break**

11:20–11:40 — Eleanor Drinkwater; "What is the meaning of this strange travestie?" *Wallace's views on colour as defence*

11:40–12:00 — James T. Costa; "Crushed under a mountain of facts": *Wallace and Darwin on sexual selection and human evolution*

## **12.00–13.00 — Lunch**

## **13:00–15:30 — AFTERNOON SESSION**

13.00–13.20 — David Collard; *Wallace on livelihoods in the Malay Archipelago and after*

13.20–13.40 — Martin Fichman; *Wallace's critique of industrial society*

13.40–14.00 — Matthias Glaubrecht; *Wallace and "A future without forests"*

## **14.00–14.20 — Tea/Coffee Break**

14.20–15.20 — Clay Bolt; *Rediscovering Wallace's Giant Bee: How a chance encounter led to the rediscovery of the world's largest bee [Keynote]*  
**co-sponsored by the Charles Darwin Trust**

15.20–15.30 — Closing Remarks

## **15.30–17.30 — RECEPTION, EXHIBIT, DISCOVERY ROOM**



# ABSTRACTS

## **WORLDS WITHIN WORLDS: WALLACE'S LIFE ARC AS REVEALED IN EIGHT DECADES OF LETTERS**

**DR RICHARD MILNER FLS | NEW YORK, NEW YORK, USA**

Fortunately for the history of ideas, the lives and thoughts of Charles Darwin and his “junior partner” Alfred Russel Wallace are documented not only in their private journals and voluminous publications, but by thousands of personal letters, which have recently been collected, annotated—and placed online for everyone to share. Highlights will be presented of some of the more interesting, offbeat, and significant quotations from the Alfred Russel Wallace Correspondence Project that throw light on Wallace’s personality, intellectual development, context of his time and culture, family background, ideas about “Spiritualism” versus “Materialism,” anthropology, and unique observations and discoveries during his travels in the Malay Archipelago as a field biologist and collector. Brief excerpts will be used to illustrate the arc of his life, from young amateur naturalist, to co-discoverer of the natural selection theory, to revered “grand old man” of science, whose ideas about evolution, botany, biogeography, and animal behavior remain vibrant, controversial, and influential to this day.

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## **“A VERY BAD HAND AT WRITING ANYTHING LIKE NARRATIVE”: SEVEN YEARS TO WRITE UP EIGHT YEARS OF TRAVEL IN THE MALAY ARCHIPELAGO**

**DR ANDREW BERRY FLS | HARVARD UNIVERSITY, CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS, USA**

Within a couple of years of his return from Southeast Asia in 1862, Wallace wrote to Darwin that he hoped to have his “small book on my Eastern journey” done by Christmas 1864. In fact, *The Malay Archipelago* did not appear until 9 March 1869. Some of the reasons for the delay were predictable—Wallace was busy with his newfound status as a celebrity scientist, and he was heavily engaged with organizing his collections and with writing up the results. Other reasons, perhaps more significant, were less straight forward. They included anxieties relating to his abilities as a writer of this kind of material. His previous travelogue on his Amazon expedition had been a commercial failure, whereas the corresponding book published by his companion on that journey, H. W. Bates, had done well. Writing to Darwin, he noted how much easier it was to write science—“I want something to argue on”—and despaired at the challenge of producing a more free-wheeling narrative. “I feel dreadfully the want of copious notes on common everyday objects, sights and sounds and incidents, which I imagined I could never forget but which I now find it impossible to recall with any accuracy.”

## **ALFRED RUSSEL WALLACE'S BIOGEOGRAPHIC VISION IN SPACE AND TIME**

**DR JAMES T. COSTA FLS | HIGHLANDS BIOLOGICAL STATION & WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY, HIGHLANDS & CULLOWHEE, NORTH CAROLINA, USA**

Like the colonial American patriot Thomas Paine, who commented that “a share in two revolutions is living to some purpose,” Alfred Russel Wallace is honored as a revolutionary twice over: as co-discoverer of the principle of natural selection and founder of modern evolutionary biogeography. Beyond his classic works describing the faunal discontinuity marked by what Huxley later called Wallace’s Line, Wallace’s magisterial biogeographic treatises *The Geographical Distribution of Animals* (1876) and *Island Life* (1880) stand as landmarks in the history of the field. Wallace’s vision of the forces shaping the geographical distribution of species was one of dynamic change in space and time, a vision that integrates evolution and species’ ebb and flow over the earth with geological and climatic processes playing out over deep time. These ideas are further explored in a previously overlooked 1882 paper by Wallace, “Die Permanenz der Continente und Oceane,” newly translated to English (Smith, Costa, & Glaubrecht 2019, *Archives of Natural History* 46: 265–282). This paper well exemplifies Wallace’s understanding of the intricate relationship between biological and geological history, so central to his developing model of biogeographic regionalization.

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## **“WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS STRANGE TRAVESTIE?” WALLACE’S VIEWS ON COLOUR AS DEFENCE**

**ELEANOR DRINKWATER | UNIVERSITY OF YORK, YORK, U.K.**

Why are some animals colourful and some not? Though this may seem like a simple question, many aspects of colour in nature have sparked debate among academics for centuries. Wallace embraced this debate surrounding animal colouration, developing theories which in many cases are still respected today. Two areas in particular in which Wallace provided key insights were his ideas about warning colouration, and his ideas about animal camouflage, and how both of these are key to animal defence. Taking examples from his work on caterpillars, butterflies and orchid mantids we will explore which of Wallace’s ideas on colour have courted controversy, and which have stood the test of time.

## **“CRUSHED UNDER A MOUNTAIN OF FACTS”: WALLACE AND DARWIN ON SEXUAL SELECTION AND HUMAN EVOLUTION**

**DR JAMES T. COSTA FLS | HIGHLANDS BIOLOGICAL STATION & WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY, HIGHLANDS & CULLOWHEE, NORTH CAROLINA, USA**

Wallace and Darwin never saw eye to eye over humans or sexual selection, and argued over these interrelated issues off and on through the 1860s and 70s. On hearing about the imminent publication of Darwin's *Descent of Man*, Wallace quipped to Darwin, tongue in cheek: "I look forward with fear & trembling to being crushed under a mountain of facts!" The two came to agree to disagree, yet far from being a stalemate their disagreements yielded a fruitful cross-pollination. In this talk I explore facets of that cross-pollination as it pertains to human evolution, from Wallace's influence on Darwin's thinking about the human mind to his adaptation of Darwinian female choice in a form of human self-domestication. As with so much of Wallace's thinking, Wallace's perspectives on these subjects can be traced to his extensive travels in the Malay Archipelago, the "central and controlling incident" of his life.

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## **WALLACE ON LIVELIHOODS IN THE MALAY ARCHIPELAGO AND AFTER**

**DR DAVID COLLARD | UNIVERSITY OF BATH, BATH, UK**

Wallace, the social anthropologist, was a keen observer of how "savage" peoples earned their livelihoods in relation to the land, giving detailed accounts of their traditions, life styles, tools, and economic activities. In many, though by no means all, cases he was impressed by their prosperity and social organisation. On his return he became appalled at the contrasting low levels of "well-being" and stunted lives of urban industrial workers in so-called civilised countries. This juxtaposition soon led him to campaign for land nationalisation and more gradually, to his own version of socialism.

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## **WALLACE'S CRITIQUE OF INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY**

**DR MARTIN FICHMAN | YORK UNIVERSITY, ONTARIO, CANADA**

Since his early experiences in land surveying and his eight-year journey in the Malay Archipelago, Wallace had been alert to societal and philosophical issues. His attention to these matters assumed a more critical and urgent stance as the outlines of late 19th century industrial society took shape and he became alarmed by certain of the environmental and cultural impacts of science and technology. Instead of 'progress', Wallace saw increasing industrial squalor and inequity, environmental degradation and pollution, and physical and socioeconomic dysfunction. Wallace's heightened efforts during the last decades of his life to advance the causes of greater industrial justice, global equity, and environmental sanity resonate with contemporary societal concerns.

## WALLACE AND “A FUTURE WITHOUT FORESTS”

PROF DR MATTHIAS GLAUBRECHT | UNIVERSITÄT HAMBURG, HAMBURG, GERMANY

We currently lose a widely unknown plethora of species, and biodiversity is in crisis globally, with defaunation and annihilation being major threats to most environments, but in particular due to deforestation in Southeast Asia. Yet we have hardly detected and described the majority of Earth’s biological diversity and in evolutionary biology no consensus is reached as to the nature of species as evolutionary entities, their definition and the practice of delimitation. Against this background I will discuss some aspects of biodiversity change in the Malay Archipelago since Wallace’s travelling, combined with a more general outlook on the future of biodiversity.

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## KEYNOTE

### REDISCOVERING WALLACE’S GIANT BEE: HOW A CHANCE ENCOUNTER LED TO THE REDISCOVERY OF THE WORLD’S LARGEST BEE

CLAY BOLT | NATURAL HISTORY AND CONSERVATION PHOTOGRAPHER, BOZEMAN, MONTANA, USA

With an estimated wingspan of two and a half inches, Wallace’s giant bee is the world’s largest bee. In 1858, famous British naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace discovered the bee on the Indonesian island of Bacan. It wasn’t seen again until 1981, when entomologist Adam Messer rediscovered it on three Indonesian islands in North Maluku. Since then, despite its conspicuous size, it had remained lost to science. Following a chance encounter at the American Museum of Natural History in 2015, natural history photographer Clay Bolt—a bee specialist—began to work with entomologist Eli Wyman to track down evidence that Wallace’s giant bee still existed in the wild. In January of 2019, the pair made history when news of the rediscovery went viral around the world, with Bolt making the first images and film of a living Wallace’s giant bee. Now the race is on to protect the species from collectors willing to pay extraordinary prices for specimens of this magnificent creature.

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