



Australian Government
Australian National Botanic Gardens

MEDIA RELEASE

11 February 2009

Happy birthday Charles Darwin!

Celebrations are happening around the globe leading up to the 200th 'birthday' of naturalist Charles Darwin, which falls on this Thursday 12 February 2009.

As part of these celebrations, the Australian National Botanic Gardens presents talks by a panel of artists and scientists on Darwin's legacy and how his research has contributed to our knowledge and understanding of the natural world.

The talks will take place on **Thursday 12 February at 12.30pm in the Theatrette** and are free to attend. Speakers include artist Julie Ryder, Dr Elizabeth Truswell and Dr Rosemary Purdie.

Julie Ryder, a Canberra-based textile artist whose work is now on show at the Gardens, said Charles Darwin is best known for his explanation of where the diversity of life comes from.

"Through his collections, discoveries and building on the ideas of other thinkers of his time, Darwin provided scientific evidence that all species have evolved from common ancestors. His concept of natural selection is now a guiding principle of modern biology," Ms Ryder said.

"My current exhibition, *generate*, was inspired by Darwin's five year journey on the ship the *HMS Beagle* and the impact this exotic journey had on his ideas of social and natural history. On Darwin's birthday, I will talk about aspects of his personal life and how they inspired my work in the exhibition at the Gardens."

Dr Elizabeth Truswell, a palaeontologist as well as a practicing artist, will talk about Darwin's early education and how he was introduced to geology at Cambridge University in Britain.

"I believe that if Darwin had not had this crucial training in geology, it is unlikely that his famed *On the Origin of Species* would ever have been written," Dr Truswell said.

Dr Rosemary Purdie will tell how Darwin's botany contributed to his *On the Origin of Species* and how the breadth of his botanical work and findings were captured in seven botanical books he published afterwards.

"Observations of plants during the Beagle expedition played an important part in Darwin's thinking about how species develop. However it was his botanical experiments carried out at his home after returning from the voyage that enabled him to test his ideas. He continued this work over almost 40 years, publishing his last botanical findings when he was 71 years old." Dr Purdie said.

Dr Truswell was elected as a Fellow of the Australian Academy of Science in 1985. Her study of fossil pollens has helped the development of an Australian and Antarctic time scale for geology and biogeography. Dr Purdie is an Honorary Associate at the Australian National Herbarium and was Commissioner for the Environment for the ACT Government from 2004 to 2006. She has been a member of various scientific advisory committees relating to botany and natural resource management for the ACT and Australian governments.

The panel discussions, sponsored by the Friends of the Gardens, will include short presentations, question and answer time and finish with birthday cake!

Media contact: Sabrina Sonntag 6250 9538