



ON-SITE BIOLOGY COLLOQUIUM

Friday, 22 May 2026 | 4 pm | S3 05-02 Conference Room 1

Hosted by Professor Antonia Monteiro

Map to Block S3



A. R. Wallace, a great naturalist in Southeast Asia and how his story became pop science myth



John van Wyhe

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Alfred Russel Wallace (1823-1913) and his teams of local assistants collected 125,000 specimens of insects, birds and mammals from 1854-1862. He formulated the 'Wallace Line' and a theory of evolution similar to Charles Darwin's. Their names became forever linked after the publication of Darwin's epoch-making book *Origin of Species* (1859).

Wallace's story has been endlessly told in recent decades: Despite coming up with 'the same theory', poor Wallace was unfairly treated and he lost out compared to the wealthy and well-connected Darwin who got all the fame for the theory. It is a great injustice that Wallace has become forgotten. Had his ideas been published first, we would have 'Wallaceism' today instead of 'Darwinism'. And so on.

Yet, this version of the story began only in the 1960s-1980s when every detail of it was created by amateurs, cranks and conspiracy theorists. It became the only version of the Wallace story to the present day.

This talk will demonstrate the bombshell truth: not only is this modern story of Wallace false, its part of a wider trend since the 1960s with best-selling histories of science using the same, irresistible narrative of an unfairly treated underdog genius.

About the Speaker

John van Wyhe is a historian of science, writer, broadcaster and Director of The Complete Work of Charles Darwin Online, called a 'monumental scholarly and bibliographic achievement'. He has published 17 books and many other scholarly and popular publications. In fact, he has published more on the Victorian naturalists Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace than any other historian and discovered hundreds of unrecorded publications, c.100 letters, 12 photographs of Darwin, and 3 leaves of the draft of Origin of species etc. In 2009 he was invited from the University of Cambridge to take up a position created for him at the National University of Singapore.

https://darwin-online.org.uk/people/van_wyhe.html