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What's growing on
at the Garden!

MISSOURI BOTANICAL GARDEN PART OF COLLABORATIVE EFFORT TO DIGITIZE CHARLES DARWIN'S PERSONAL LIBRARY

(ST. LOUIS): The Missouri Botanical Garden, along with other members of the Biodiversity Heritage Library (BHL) consortium, has joined the Cambridge University Library, the Darwin Manuscripts Project at the American Museum of Natural History in New York and the Natural History Museum in London in a collaborative effort to digitize the personal scientific library of Charles Darwin. The collaboration marks the first time that notes and comments scribbled by Darwin on the pages and margins of his own personal library will be available online.

The majority of Darwin's personal scientific library is held at the Cambridge University Library in England. In total, Darwin's library amounted to 1,480 books, of which 730 contain abundant research notes in their margins. These annotated books are now in the process of being digitized. The first phase of this project has just been completed, with 330 of the most heavily annotated books launched online at the Biodiversity Heritage Library for all to read at <http://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/collection/darwinlibrary>.

"The Darwin collections are among the most important and popular held within Cambridge University Library," said Anne Jarvis, university librarian. "While there has been much focus on his manuscripts and correspondence, his library hasn't always received the attention it deserves – for it is as he engaged with the ideas and theories of others that his own thinking evolved."

Because Darwin's evolutionary theory covered so many aspects of nature, reading served him as a primary source of evidence and ideas. Darwin once complained that he had become a "machine for grinding general laws out of large collections of facts."

(over)

ADD ONE: Darwin's Library

The pages of Darwin's Library, smothered in his scrawl, give a direct view of the Darwinian intellectual machine in action. With the Charles Darwin Library online, now everyone can retrace how Darwin systematically used reading to advance his science.

Most of Darwin's personal library rests at Cambridge University Library and at Down House. Although the majority of the books are scientific, some are humanities texts on subjects that Darwin transformed into scientific topics.

The series of transcriptions accompanying each page allows everyone to see which passages Darwin found relevant to his work, stimulated his thinking or just annoyed him as he read the work of others. For example, his friend Charles Lyell wrote in his famous "Principles of Geology" that there were definite limits to the variation of species. Darwin wrote alongside this, "If this were true adios theory."

The online transcribed marginalia relies on the work of two scholars, Mario A. Di Gregorio and Nick Gill, published in the 1990s and now greatly enhanced by Gill. In addition to images of the books and transcribed jots, the information is fully indexed so that people can search for topics and ideas relevant to their interests or work.

"Getting to make these historic books available to the world for the first time is quite an honor," said Chris Freeland, director of the Missouri Botanical Garden's Center for Biodiversity Informatics. Freeland and his team of programmers built the technology components needed to deliver Darwin's digitized library and handwritten annotations to users all over the world. Working closely with project scholars, they built new interfaces to handle transcriptions and annotations into the existing Biodiversity Heritage Library web portal, a freely available digital library of more than 90,000 texts dating from the 15th century.

The digitization project was jointly sponsored by the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) and National Endowment of the Humanities through a Transatlantic Digitization Collaboration Grant.

For more information about the Missouri Botanical Garden, visit www.mobot.org. For more information on the Biodiversity Heritage Library, visit www.biodiversitylibrary.org.

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NOTE: Digital images available by request. Download media materials at www.mobot.org/press.

About the Missouri Botanical Garden:

The Missouri Botanical Garden's mission is "to discover and share knowledge about plants and their environment in order to preserve and enrich life." Today, 152 years after opening, the Missouri Botanical Garden is a National Historic Landmark and a center for science, conservation, education and horticultural display.

About the Biodiversity Heritage Library:

The Biodiversity Heritage Library (BHL) is a consortium of 12 natural history and botanical libraries that cooperate to digitize and make accessible the legacy literature of biodiversity held in their collections and to make that literature available for open access and responsible use as a part of a global "biodiversity commons." BHL also serves as the foundational literature component of the Encyclopedia of Life (EOL). BHL content may be freely viewed through the online reader or downloaded in part or as a complete work.