



# *The North Texas*

# Skeptic

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<http://www.ntskeptics.org>

## Monthly Meeting and Dinner a Success!

by John Brandt

The North Texas Skeptics held our “May” meeting on April 29 this year, so as to accommodate Dr. Wesley Elsberry’s visit to the Dallas/Ft. Worth area. (Thus, there won’t be another meeting in May, giving me until June to get ready for the next meeting! We will have a May social dinner, however; presumably on the 27th.)

We had a good turnout of 10 people, including Dr. Elsberry himself, and a creationist! (You have to have some respect for someone from “the other side” to come into hostile territory. But of course, we don’t bite – hard.)

It was fascinating to listen to creationist arguments. Our guest was hung up on the lack of what one might call “failed experiments” in the fossil record: why don’t we see fossils of hideously deformed creatures which would result from particularly unfortunate mutations?

To a skeptic, such a question is ridiculous: such creatures would be too unfit to survive, so they would never form a population large enough to have any likelihood of fossilizing.

But our guest was nonplussed: he kept insisting that fossilization was extremely common; so common that we should see such creatures anyhow.

This is just wrong. Fossilization only occurs under certain special conditions; it isn’t common at all. Or, more precisely, it’s rarely common, and commonly rare.

Eventually, it became clear that our guest’s mistaken beliefs about fossilization flowed from his belief in a young Earth. Clearly, if Earth is only around 10,000 years old, then fossilization must be common, in order to have the number of fossils we actually do have.

So really, his argument boiled down to: Evolution is inconsistent with a young Earth; the earth is young; therefore evolution is incorrect! It never occurred to him that he might be wrong about the age of the Earth!

### EVENTS CALENDAR

#### May Program

The “May” program was held April 29 this time to accommodate our guest speaker. There will not be another program in May.

The **June program** will be held June 10, 2 p.m., at:  
The Center for Nonprofit Management  
2900 Live Oak Street in Dallas

Check the **NTS Hotline** at 214-335-9248.

#### Future Meeting Dates

June 10, 2006

July 8, 2006

August 12, 2006

September 9, 2006

October 14, 2006

November 11, 2006

December 9, 2006

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 NTS functions at which admission is charged at no or  
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One other thing: he kept repeating that most mutations are disastrous – hence the commonness of malformed organisms he presumed should be in the fossil record, but aren't. That's also wrong. It's true that mutations that have big effects are usually disastrous, because they disable a critical gene. But most mutations have little or no noticeable effect, and those could be good or bad, depending on the environment. Those little, barely noticeable effects (either from mutations, or from new combinations of genes resulting from sexual reproduction) are what natural selection works on. Scientists have to use radiation or chemicals to accelerate the natural mutation rate by several orders of magnitude, in order to get the rare, big mutations that tell them something about what particular genes do.

That evening, we had our usual social dinner at Good Eats, and conversed about the usual wide range of both skeptical and non-skeptical topics.



## Beware of the Blog

by John Blanton

No, this isn't an old Steve McQueen movie. It's *Blog*, not *Blob*, and it's short for Web log. In April we changed our Web hosting provider, and the new service provides tools for setting up and maintaining a Blog.

Go to the NTS Web page and click on the Blog link. Read the posts contributed by the bloggers and take part in the dialog. Contributions are allowed from selected Skeptics, so if you want your opinion appreciated you need to contact one of the bloggers by e-mail and send your thoughts.

Blog contributors are members of the NTS board plus other Skeptics who are notoriously active in the NTS. So, there is a benefit to showing up for the meetings. If you feel you should be added to the contributors' list then contact us and present your case. Being interested enough to submit your request will count heavily in your favor. I'm thinking we should even invite some creationists and UFO wing nuts to contribute.

If you have never logged on to our Web site, here are the links:

<http://ntskeptics.org/>

<http://ntskeptics.org/blog/>

## Web News

by John Blanton

*The World Wide Web is a wonderful source of information and news. Some of it is true, and some of it is not.*

### Do planet cycles, history coordinate?

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/news/news2006-04-27.htm#planet>

<http://www.startribune.com/384/story/394759.html>

**Historian Richard Tarnas says patterns in planetary cycles are consistent enough that we can recognize trends and attempt to shape the outcome of events.**

**Graydon Royce, *Star Tribune***

In *Cosmos and the Psyche* Tarnas “argues that we are in the midst of a seismic historical shift in which nonscientific methods are again asserting themselves in research efforts to understand the world.” He discusses “how the orbiting paths of planets correlate with other historical periods.”

In a phone interview Tarnas took questions from *Star Tribune* writer Royce:

**Q — Is it difficult for the science community to let nonscientific information back into the conversation about how the world works?**

Tarnas responded that there (at least) two views of scientific understanding. The first type, the majority of the scientific community, takes a “very concrete” view. He went on to say “...there’s a growing segment that is aware of the limits of current scientific knowledge. They recognize that not all the answers to life’s persistent questions are susceptible to answers from science.”

**Q — Are planetary cycles causative, or merely coincidental?**

Tarnas believes there is no “causal relationship.” Rather, “...the universe is integrated so that planetary movements of the macrocosm and patterns of human experience, the microcosm, have an underlying coherence.”

He seems to have been talking to Rupert Sheldrake. We have previously discussed Sheldrake’s far-out ideas, sometimes rolled up as “morphic resonance.” See one report at the following link:

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/1998/1998january/january1998.htm>

And, finally:

**Q — What cautionary advice can you give?**

**A —** We’re in the middle of a three- or four-year alignment that has in the past regularly coincided with a period of deep uncertainty and a crisis of faith and values — a sense of spiritual or social malaise in the culture. But we’re also getting the beginnings of a 15-year alignment whose cycle coincided with the 1960s, in which there does tend to be very consistently a collective impulse toward radical change, radical reform. There can be very positive things that tend to go with this. But there has also been — can be — a political and social turmoil, a clashing of the forces of the new with the forces of the old in ways that can be pretty problematic. So much will depend on what lessons we’ve learned from the ‘60s, and what the generation that was born at that time and is coming into power brings to the task. Can they synthesize the need for change with the values of the tradition?

### The real gap in evolution is between the evolutionists’ ears

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/news/news2006-04-27.htm#gap>

<http://www.floridabaptistwitness.com/5812.article>

**Time for Truth Ministries Published April 27, 2006**

**Point of View By DON WALTON**

*Don Walton is founder of Time for Truth Ministries and a full-time evangelist and conference speaker. For more information visit [www.timefortruth.org](http://www.timefortruth.org).*

Isn’t it amazing what today’s scientists can deduce from a mere rock or dust particle? Do you remember the Genesis space capsule? Scientists assured us that this important space mission, designed to gather solar atoms, would eventually enable them to explain the origin of the universe. Unfortunately, the space capsule crashed upon its return to the earth. Its parachute malfunctioned due to the fact that it had been put in backwards. Now I don’t know about you, but as far as I’m concerned, scientists who can’t figure out which way to put in a parachute have no chance of figuring out the origin of the universe.

That certainly looks bad for mainstream science. Back to parachute packing class for you guys. But wait. Walton doesn’t stop there. Next he takes on evolution:

Now we come to the big scientific news of late. A group of scientists, led by University of Chicago paleontologist Neil Shubin, is claiming to have discovered evolution's "missing link" between fish and land animals. As reported in *Nature*, Shubin's research team discovered fossils of a 375-million-year-old fish in the Canadian Arctic, 600 miles from the North Pole. Although the well-preserved skeletons are undoubtedly of a fish with fins and scales, scientists believe that they can also detect traits that suggest this fish evolved into an amphibian, which evolved into a reptile, which evolved into a mammal, which evolved into a man. According to Dr. Michael J. Novacek, this "fishapod," as the scientists have dubbed the newly discovered fossil remains, is all that is needed "to show that the creationists are flatly wrong."

Scientists certainly have been gladdened by the discovery of yet another transitional fossil. But Walton is having none of this. He brings up, as creationists often do, the *Coelacanth*. This is a fish long known only to paleontologists and to them only through a few fossils. The common belief was the *Coelacanth* had become extinct. You see, extinction is a major part of the story of evolution, else we would still have all these dinosaurs around.

Bad news for the scientists. About 70 years ago a live specimen was discovered. Then another. And another. Obviously, the scientists were wrong. Wrong about the *Coelacanth*. Therefore wrong about extinction and wrong about evolution.

Well, that's damning evidence. For those of a peculiar mind set.

Creationist cartoonist Jonny Hart has drawn the popular B.C. cartoon strip since I was in high school, which also seems to be a contradiction of extinction. He has used this theme to attack evolution in his strip on more than one occasion. If Y evolved from X, then why do we still have X? Hart, and Walton, either do not notice, or else they choose to ignore, that extinction of a species is part of the story of evolution, but it is not a necessary condition. Fishes are a distant ancestor of the human species, but fish have not gone extinct. Else I need to check the date on a can of tuna I have in the cupboard.

While I am on the subject, here is a link to Johnny Hart's B.C. Ironically, I notice it is distributed by the Creators syndicate:

[http://www.creators.com/comics\\_show.cfm?comicname=bc](http://www.creators.com/comics_show.cfm?comicname=bc)

I'm convinced that the only gap in evolution is the one between the ears of all who adhere to it. Likewise, I'm convinced that this is a gap that most evolutionists will never discover until it is eternally too late. Unlike evolution, evolutionists don't have gazillions of years to be

proven right. They only have this short lifetime to get right with their Creator whom they repudiate with their cockamamie theory.

There's no denying it, Walton's argument is unassailable. Invoking the creator is a sure fire way to demonstrate the fallacy of evolution. Skeptics: Get in line before it's too late.

## Genesis of a museum

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/news/news2006-04-27.htm#museum>

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/chi-0604250148apr25,1,6574250.story?coll=chi-newsnationworld-hed>

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/1999/1999october/october1999.htm#genesis>

### Creationists, saying all the answers are in the Bible, put their beliefs on display in \$25 million facility

By Lisa Anderson *Tribune* national correspondent

Ken Ham is president of Answers in Genesis, "believed to be the world's largest creationist organization." We have touched on his activities in past issues.

Ken Ham 'is one of the most in-demand Christian speakers in North America. In 1993, Ken spoke to over 100,000 people directly, and to millions on hundreds of radio broadcasts. Many thousands of others watched his acclaimed film, *The Genesis Solution*, in 1993.<sup>2</sup> According to the AiG Web site he has a bachelor's degree in applied science from the Queensland Institute of Technology and a Diploma of Education from the University of Queensland.

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/1999/1999october/october1999.htm>

The quote is from the AiG Web site at <http://www.answersingenesis.org>. As we reported back then, AiG is the American counterpart to the Australian creationist group Creation Science Foundation. Ham is a co-founder of both organizations.

The \$25 million facility mentioned above is the Creation Museum being constructed by AiG in Kentucky close by the Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky International Airport. The project has been in the works at least since 1998, when AiG became embroiled in a zoning dispute over its construction (<http://www.answersingenesis.org/docs/3877.asp>).

A lot of news is being made these days by "Old Earth" creationism (OEC), exemplified by "Intelligent Design." However, AiG is YEC, Young-Earth Creationism.

Using biblical calculations, young-Earth creationists believe the planet is about 6,000 years old; old-Earth creationists believe it could be older. Both, however, take the Bible literally and reject Charles Darwin's evolutionary theory that all life, including human, shares common ancestry and developed through random mutation and natural selection. Evolution enjoys near-universal support among scientists.

Ham and the other AiG people don't let fossil fish findings pass unchallenged.

Just hours after the fossil fish, called Tiktaalik roseae, landed on the front pages of many newspapers earlier this month, it also surfaced on the Answers in Genesis Web site. In a posting titled "Gone fishin' for a missing link?" the organization, in effect, threw Tiktaalik roseae back.

"Because evolutionists want to discover transitional forms, when they find a very old fish with leg-bone-like bones in its fins, they want to interpret this as evidence that it is some sort of transitional creature. . . . It may be just another example of the wonderful design of our Creator God," the posting said.

Unlike the OECs, AiG is straight-forward in its claims. Rather than denying any religious intent, they bring it front and center.

For creationists, there are no transitional creatures and no doubts. In the Book of Genesis, the biblical calendar of creation is as clear and simple as it is sacred: God created creatures of the sea and the air on Day 5. Land animals and man appeared on Day 6. And all of this, including the creation of Earth, happened about 6,000 years ago.

"Is the Bible the word of God or is it not? If you're going to reinterpret it from ideas outside the Bible, which continue to change, then it's not," said Ham, 54, a former high school biology teacher from Australia, who leads Answers in Genesis' 12-year-old U.S. branch. "The point I make is the Bible's account of creation is so black and white and has not changed, but man's ideas have changed."

Chicago Tribune writer Anderson underscores the popularity of Ham's views. Gallup polls over the last quarter of a century demonstrate that half of Americans agree that "God created human beings pretty much in their present form at one time within the last 10,000 years or so." Americans also think creationism should be taught in public schools, along with evolution.

AiG sees the museum as a draw for recruitment to their cause.

"The 250,000 people [per year] going to it will go back to their legislators and pressure them to vote for Jesus," said Volney Gay, director of the Center for Religion and Culture at Vanderbilt University in Nashville. "There's a suspicion of science and a suspicion of intellectuals in general."

## Evolution should be taught as fact, says top scientist

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/news/news2006-04-22.htm#evolution>

<http://education.guardian.co.uk/schools/story/0,,1758665,00.html>

It appears those evolutionists will never give up.

Children should be taught from the age of 11 that Darwin's theory of evolution is a fact, an eminent scientist said today.

Richard Pike, the chief executive of the Royal Society of Chemistry, said that references to it being a "theory" should be abandoned.

Pike made his remarks to prepare listeners for the coming visit by John Mackay from Australia. Mackay was expected to attack "Darwin's ideas" and to assert "that Genesis is literally true and that the Earth is a few thousands of years old, not millions."

Dr Pike said: "Above all, we should no longer talk of the theory of evolution as though it is 'just an idea'. So well-established is it, that it now warrants the designation of an immutable scientific law, and should be taught as such. It is on this basis that further dialogue should begin."

Earlier, Royal Society scientists argued "against the teaching of Christian theories such as creationism in school biology lessons."

## Study: Medical Manual's Authors Often Tied to Drugmakers

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/news/news2006-04-22.htm#study>

<http://www.intelihealth.com/IH/ihtIH/EMIHC270/333/21291/465506.html?d=dmtICNNNews>

Wait. What's this doing here? This isn't news.

## Oklahoma Update

I will wrap up with something close to home. This is from the Evolution Education Update newsletter. It's from the National Center for Science Education. NCSE is the major organization in the U.S. supporting the teaching of evolution. Coincidentally, they are also our major source of opposition to creationism.

Oklahoma's House Bill 2107 was passed by the House by a vote of 77-10 on March 2, 2006. On March 15, it was referred to the Senate Committee on Appropriations, and then on March 21 to the Appropriations subcommittee on education, where it remains. The bill finds that "existing law does not expressly protect the right of teachers identified by the United States Supreme Court in *Edwards v. Aguillard* to present scientific critiques of prevailing scientific theories" and encourages the presentation of "the full range of scientific views" with regard to "biological or chemical origins of life."

When the House passed the bill, the Associated Press (March 2, 2006) quoted its lead sponsor, Representative Sally Kern (R-District 55), as saying, "This bill is not about a belief in God. It is not about religion. It is about science. ... I'm not asking for Sunday school to be in a science class." Her colleague Tad Jones (R-District 9), however, expressed his support for the bill by saying, "Do you think you come from a monkeyman? ... Did we come from slimy algae 4.5 billion years ago or are we a unique creation of God? I think it's going to be exciting for students to discuss these issues."

A subsequent editorial in *The Oklahoman* (March 7, 2006) argued, "This proposed law is unnecessary. Teachers are free to have discussions with their students, to help them think critically about important issues." Adopting a more caustic tone, the *Tahlequah Daily Press* (March 22, 2006) referred to the decision in *Kitzmiller v. Dover*, warning, "Mrs. Kern may not want to educate herself on the intricacies of evolutionary theory, but she ought to at least bone up on the First Amendment. Especially the part about Congress making no law respecting an establishment of religion."

Community opposition to HB 2107 was expressed at a press conference sponsored by the Tulsa Interfaith Alliance on March 22, the *Tulsa World* (March 23, 2006) reports. Professors from the University of Tulsa argued

that the bill would adversely affect science education; the president of the Tulsa school board explained that the bill was unnecessary; a partner in a local oil company noted that businesses are concerned about the quality of science education; and a professor of law at the University of Tulsa commented that the state might incur legal fees exceeding \$1 million, as in *Kitzmiller*, should the bill be passed and successfully challenged.

HB 2107 is one of four antievolution bills to be introduced in the Oklahoma legislature in 2006. The other three are HCR 1043 (encouraging the state board of education and local school boards to ensure that students are able to "critically evaluate scientific theories including, but not limited to, the theory of evolution" with regard to "biological or chemical origins of life"), HB 2526 (authorizing school districts to teach "intelligent design"), and SB 1959 (encouraging the presentation of "the full range of scientific views"). Although these bills are still alive, according to Oklahoma's legislative website, Oklahomans for Excellence in Science Education regards them as effectively dead.

**For the AP story (via the *Kansas City Star*), visit:**

<http://www.kansascity.com/mld/kansascity/news/local/14002872.htm>

**For the *Tahlequah Daily Press*'s editorial, visit:**

[http://www.tahlequahdailypress.com/editorials/local\\_story\\_081100449.html](http://www.tahlequahdailypress.com/editorials/local_story_081100449.html)

**For the website of Oklahomans for Excellence in Science Education, visit:**

<http://www.biosurvey.ou.edu/oese/>

**For NCSE's coverage of previous events in Oklahoma, visit:**

<http://www.ncseweb.org/pressroom.asp?state=OK>

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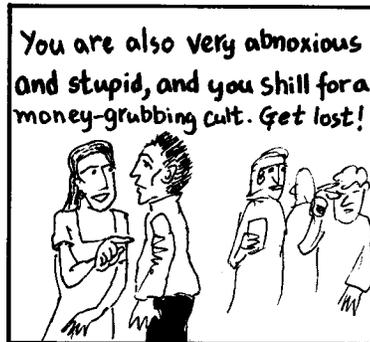
in the body of an e-mail to [majordomo@ncseweb2.org](mailto:majordomo@ncseweb2.org).

Eugenie C. Scott's *Evolution vs. Creationism* is now available: <http://www.ncseweb.org/evc>



## Skeptic Ink

by Prasad Golla and John Blanton.  
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## What's new

By Robert Park

[Robert Park publishes the What's New column at <http://www.bobpark.org/>. Following are some clippings of interest.]

### Miracle medicine: will going to church help you live longer?

The Journal of the American Board of Family Medicine published a study by Dr. Daniel Hall of the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center who found that people who attend weekly religious services live longer. Dr. Hall, who is also an Episcopal priest, compared average church contributions to the cost of membership in Bally's or to taking Lipitor to lower cholesterol, and concludes religion is more cost effective. Everybody pays the same for Lipitor, but they put different amounts in the collection plate. What is the correlation between money individuals put in the plate and their longevity? Dr. Richard Sloan of Columbia University Medical Center, author of a forthcoming book, "Blind Faith: The Unholy Alliance of Religion and Medicine," called the study "silly." The most obvious confounder is that as their health fails people are able to attend church less. The obvious solution is to take money out of the plate to pay for membership in a gym.

### Missing link: filling in all those "gaps" in Darwin's theory.

Every attempt to require public schools to teach alternatives to evolution has emphasized the "gaps" in Darwin's theory. In 1859, when Darwin published "The Origin of Species," it was all gaps. It was Darwin's theory that gave organization to the collecting of fossils, creating the science of paleontology. The only surprise is how complete the fossil record has gotten in only 150 years. Two reports in yesterday's issue of Nature,

beautifully bridged a remaining gap. Fossils of a 375-million-year-old fish were found in the Canadian arctic, 600 miles from the North Pole. It was a fish with a swivel head, a wrist and an elbow, clearly a transition between fish and land-dwelling animals. It seems to be a perfect candidate for the hypothesized intermediate species.

### Missing genes: finding the key that opens Darwin's black box.

It was a lousy day for intelligent design, which has had a lot of bad days lately. Even as a missing link showed up on the pages of Nature, a report in Science from the University of Oregon showed how a new hormone-receptor pair evolved. An existing molecule, created for a different role, was recruited to do the new job. The lead author, Joseph Thornton, believes this may be common in the evolution of complex systems. Hormone-receptor pairs would seem to be an example of what intelligent-design guru Michael Behe calls "irreducible complexity" (ID). One without the other would be useless. However, Behe scoffed to the NY Times that Hormone-receptor pairs aren't really ID. Either he's still a little cranky from the Dover trial, or he just prefers miracles (WN 21 Oct 05).

### Global warming: the heat is coming from the Bush White House.

Two months ago, NASA climate scientist James Hansen was pressured to cool it (WN 10 Feb 06). The White House appointee in NASA public relations who pressured him has since been fired for inflating his resume. Michael Griffin has now issued a new policy allowing NASA scientists to speak their minds as long as they give their bosses notice. Yesterday, however, a Wash Post story reported that other scientists doing climate research for the government complain that they're also being muzzled by the Bush administration.

Bob Park can be reached via email at [opa@aps.org](mailto:opa@aps.org).

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