

Life on earth

The Creator's handiwork

David Burges

“For thus saith the LORD That created the heavens; God Himself That formed the earth and made it; He hath established it, He created it not in vain, He formed it to be inhabited: I am the LORD; and there is none else” (Isa. 45:18).

THE BEAUTIFUL PLANET upon which we are privileged to live is declared by the inspired prophet to be the handiwork of the God of the Bible. Everything about the earth affirms the wisdom and purpose of its Creator; only the activities of sinful man scar and sully its surface. The earth teems with life of every kind, and an immense variety of organisms is found in every type of habitat, from the deepest ocean trenches to the tops of the mountains. In the memorable words of Brother John Thomas: “This orb of the starry heavens shines with a glory similar to that of its kindred spheres. Viewed from them, it is seen sparkling ‘like a diamond in the sky’; and with the rest of the heavens, declares the glory of God, and shows forth the handiwork of Him that did create it”.¹

In stark contrast, the search for life beyond the earth has so far met with no success at all. It was thirty-five years ago that Armstrong and Aldrin made the first landing on the moon,² and since then spacecraft have visited and photographed most of the other planets of the Solar System and many of their moons. Those that have solid surfaces appear uniformly barren and lifeless, and none has been found to be in any way suitable for sustaining life. Furthermore, the prolonged search over several decades for intelligent radio signals from extraterrestrial sources (SETI) has so far likewise proved fruitless, while the observation of planetary systems orbiting nearby stars has to date revealed none that remotely matches the conditions that prevail in our Solar System and on the earth.

The living planet

MANY writers have drawn attention to the unique features of the earth that suit it for life.³ For instance, it orbits the sun at just the distance to provide equable temperatures on its surface, so that water, essential for life, can exist as a liquid. The sun itself appears to be a particularly quiet star, producing none of the im-

mense, life-threatening flares that have been observed on other stars of similar size and luminosity.⁴ It is also positioned at an ideal zone in the Milky Way galaxy, not too close to the centre, where the levels of radiation would be too high for life to exist.



Viewed from space, the earth is an orb of great beauty, placed by the Creator so as to provide the best environment for its great variety of life.

Another astronomical feature is the presence of the giant planet Jupiter at an ideal orbital distance to act as a gravitational shield for the earth, preventing many impacts from asteroids and comets. The earth itself is of a size that provides an ideal level of gravity, allowing free movement for living creatures across its surface while being strong enough to retain a life-bearing atmosphere.

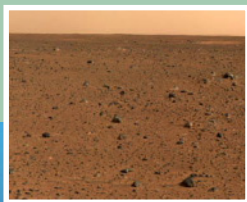
The moon is also important, being exceptionally large as a satellite in relation to the size of the earth. Its effect has been to stabilise the tilt of the earth's axis at its present figure of 23.5 degrees, ensuring the continuity of the seasons, as decreed by God (Gen. 8:22). Additionally, this tilt, together with the earth's moderate rate of rotation on its axis, once in twenty-four hours, provides a mechanism for equalising and stabilising the surface temperatures around the globe, optimising the surface area available for life to flourish.

1. *Elpis Israel*, fifteenth edition, p. 1.
2. Apollo 11 Mission, 20 Jul. 1969.
3. “The earth is the LORD's, and the fulness thereof”, *The Testimony*, Oct. 2000, p. 387.
4. “The sun to rule by day”, *The Testimony*, Apr. 1999, p. 125.

The earth's oceans are vital for life (below). Contrast the barrenness of the surface of Mars.



Free Nature Pictures



NASA

Yet another controlling and moderating factor for the world's surface temperature is provided by the oceans, covering four-fifths of the planet's surface, which store heat in the summer and release it in the winter. The seas also play an important role in controlling the composition of the atmosphere; photosynthesis in marine microbes provides around fifty per cent of the oxygen in the air that allows life to flourish on earth. All animals depend upon the level of oxygen in the air: much lower than the present twenty-one per cent and they would struggle to breathe; much higher and the world would be swept by devastating fires that would endanger all life. On the other hand, plants depend upon an adequate concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, around 300 parts per million. It is this that is currently growing alarmingly due to the activities of man in burning fossil fuels, with incalculable results.⁵

All this points to the earth's uniqueness as a place for life. Modern man mocks the belief that held sway before Copernicus, that the earth was the centre of the universe. Since then observational astronomy has reduced the earth from this position of pre-eminence to being the third planet of a minor star, one of 100 billion stars in the Milky Way, itself one of a billion galaxies. This has allowed evolutionists to claim confidently that the earth is just one among millions of planets throughout the universe with the potential to support life, and that consequently life must have evolved many times over.

On the contrary, however, the large number of favourable circumstances and conditions discussed above that make it possible for life to thrive on earth have made it much more likely that this is a very special place indeed. Without

discounting the possibility that the Creator has a specific purpose with other parts of His universe, the earth and life upon it are self-evidently, as Scripture declares, the results of His intelligent planning and execution: "The LORD by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding hath He established the heavens. By His knowledge the depths are broken up, and the clouds drop down the dew" (Prov. 3:19,20).

Variety—the spice of life

LIFE on earth is characterised by an immense variety, referred to by scientists as biodiversity. Even in the most extreme conditions, such as in the polar regions or the great deserts, life forms of many kinds, from bacteria, invertebrates and insects to plants and animals, are found, populating every type of habitat. Microorganisms are now known to survive even within rocks and in the sediments at the floor of the ocean. But it is in the tropics that the most spectacular explosion of life is to be found. David Attenborough, well known for his remarkable TV natural history films, which, though promoting evolution, have nevertheless brought to view many of the wonders of God's creation, describes the impact of first visiting the tropics: "Wherever I looked, I found a prodigality of pattern and colour for which I was quite unprepared. It was a revelation of the splendour and fecundity of the natural world from which I have never recovered".⁶

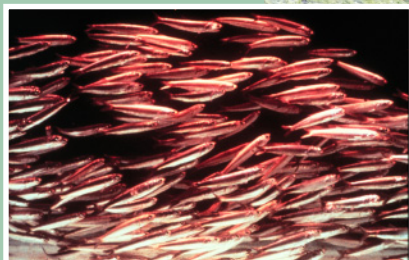
However, it is likely that an equal abundance and variety of life exists, largely unseen, within the world's great oceans.⁷ They contain a vast

5. ["Global warming and 'hidden hunger'"](#), Science Update, *The Testimony*, Sept. 2003, p. 342.
6. *Life on Earth*, 1979, p. 7.
7. See ["This great and wide sea"](#), *The Testimony*, Jan. 2004, p. 27.

Rainforests and oceans teem with life. Right: Black lizard. Below: Northern anchovies



Free Jungle Pictures



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range of creatures, from microscopic plankton to the world's largest mammal, the blue whale. This was known to the psalmist, who wrote of "this great and wide sea, wherein are things creeping *innumerable*" (104:25). As in the tropical rainforests, new species are constantly being identified, suggesting that there remain thousands still unknown to science.

This is an indication that the life God created possesses enormous potentiality to diversify in order to exploit every kind of environment. In this limited respect, the concept of natural selection is compatible with belief in Biblical creation, when it is seen as a mechanism for utilising this inbuilt diversity, a process sometimes referred to as microevolution. It is not, however, a mechanism for the *origin* of species as claimed by Darwin; after 140 years, science still awaits the first unequivocal example of a new species emerging.⁸ Furthermore, the very concept of 'species' is somewhat arbitrary and open to debate; there is no universally agreed definition of a species, and plants and animals when reproducing are frequently found to ignore the species barrier assumed by scientists.⁹

Complex relationships

IN all this variety and complexity, there is a surprising level of interdependence between different types of organisms. Many plants depend on insects for pollination, which in turn depend on those plants for their food, a phenomenon known as *symbiosis*.¹⁰ Often these relationships are completely specific, wherein a particular plant and insect are completely dependent upon each other for survival. Biologists invoke 'co-evolution' to explain these cases, supposing that each partner in such relationships evolved step by step to the present interdependence, but it is difficult to see what selective advantage exists for plants and animals to be tied into such exclusive arrangements.

In fact, viewed overall, the whole complex web of life on earth demonstrates the total interdependence of all species in the ecosystem, further demonstrating the wisdom of the Creator Who established it. The psalmist celebrated this unity of life as demonstrating the complete and continuing involvement of God in His creation: "He sendeth the springs into the valleys . . . They give drink to every beast of the field . . . He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man . . . *Thou* takest away their

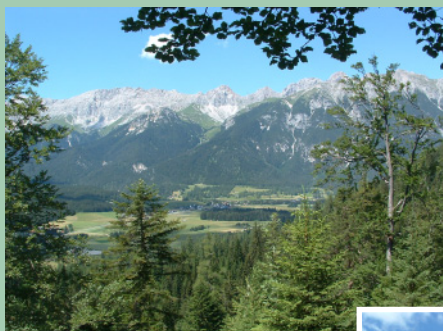


There is tremendous variety and beauty in tropical jungle flowers. Left to right: Hibiscus, Birds of Paradise, Cymbidium orchid.

breath, they die, and return to their dust. *Thou* sendest forth Thy spirit, they are created: and *Thou* renewest the face of the earth" (104:10-14, 29,30). And the Lord Jesus expressed the same truth in more homely fashion: "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father" (Mt. 10:29).

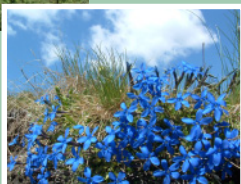
Furthermore, this 'balance of nature' is immensely robust, being capable of adjusting to changed environmental conditions or responding to natural disasters, precisely because of the capabilities for diversification built into the constituent forms of life. It is only the persistent and destructive activities of man that today seriously endanger this wonderful arrangement established by the Almighty.

8. From time to time the science press carries stories claiming the "first" example of a new species evolving may have been recorded; for example, "Scientists 'see new species born' ", BBC On-line News, Sci-/tech section, 11 June 2004, reporting on two closely-related populations of fruit fly in the Arizona desert, which researchers think may be in the early stages of diverging into separate species. This is hardly convincing evidence of 'macroevolution'.
9. Richard Milton, in *Shattering the Myths of Darwinism*, 1997, pp. 115-118, cites the contrasting examples of the ginkgo tree, which stands completely unrelated to any other species, and the willow, of which there are countless varieties that blend into each other and are impossible to differentiate.
10. See "[After his kind](#)", Judith Evans, *The Testimony*, [May 2001, p. 172](#).



Pictures: David Burges

The beauty of an alpine valley with its flowers testifies to a loving Creator. Right: Spring gentians.



Intelligent design

WITHIN this complex framework of inter-dependent species, the features of all the multitude of independent organisms display their ‘fitness for purpose’, that is, that they have been *designed* to perform their various functions by their Maker. This was recognised by early naturalists such as John Ray,¹¹ and especially William Paley,¹² who used the wonder and intricacy of nature to attest to belief in God, the argument from design. Paley was responding to the attacks of the philosopher David Hume,¹³ who countered the design argument in two ways: firstly by pointing to many examples in nature dismissed as ‘bad’ design, and secondly with the existence of evil as being incompatible with a loving God. Neither of these arguments should be serious obstacles to those who have a sound faith in the Word of God,¹⁴ but they undoubtedly were very influential in undermining faith in the Creator and preparing the way for the ultimate assault of Darwinism.

More recently the discoveries of the staggering complexity of the biochemical processes within all living cells have strengthened the design argument still further.¹⁵ Such mechanisms as the bacterial flagellum (the microscopic rotary propeller that enables bacteria to swim), the vertebrate blood-clotting cascade and the immune system all involve a level of complexity that precludes any Darwinian explanation of gradual development by the accumulation of small changes. Above all, the enormous gulf between non-living chemical molecules and the

‘simplest’ living cells is alone testimony to the creative power of God; science has been completely unable to produce any plausible naturalistic explanation of the origin of life, and will not be able to do so. Life is the gift of the Creator.

A world of beauty

THE outstanding feature of the earth and its attendant panoply of living creatures is its characteristic of ordered beauty.¹⁶ This is forever beyond purely naturalistic explanations, but manifestly proclaims the mind of the Creator. Men and women are able to appreciate this beauty because they are made in the image of God. The Scriptures repeatedly call attention to the glory of God manifest in all His works. The Lord Jesus invited us to “Consider the lilies of the field [Gk. *krinon*]¹⁷, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet . . . even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these” (Mt. 6:28,29).

God’s purpose is that ultimately the earth should perfectly reflect His glory, when all that spoils it has been removed. He has created it for eternity: “One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever” (Eccl. 1:4). We long for that time when, by His grace, we shall see that day of restoration, when all men will acknowledge, “O LORD, how manifold are Thy works! in wisdom hast Thou made them all: the earth is full of Thy riches” (Ps. 104:24).

11. *Wisdom of God Manifested in the Works Of Creation*, 1691.
12. *Natural Theology*, 1802, with its famous analogy of a watch (a mechanical device plainly manifesting the design and craftsmanship of a watchmaker) to many living structures, particularly the eye, demonstrating the handiwork of the Creator.
13. *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, 1779.
14. See for example Alan Fowler, “[The problem of suffering](#)”, *The Testimony*, Mar. 2005, p. 79.
15. Michael Behe, “Irreducible Complexity”, in *Debating Design*, edited by Dembski and Ruse, 2004, p. 353; and *Darwin’s Black Box, The Biochemical Challenge to Darwinism*, 1997, pp. 39ff.
16. Conveyed by the New Testament Greek word *kosmos*, ‘world’, with its senses of order, arrangement, ornament, adornment (Vine), hence the English word ‘cosmetic’.
17. Usually considered to refer to the scarlet crown anemone, which clothes the fields of Israel in the early spring; see Michael Zohary, *Plants of the Bible*, 1982.