

**2nd International Conference on Alfred Russel Wallace- His Predecessors and Successors. Naturalists,
Explorers and Field Scientists in South-East Asia and Australasia**

7 – 8 November 2013

Jointly organized by:

Institute of Biodiversity and Environmental Conservation (IBEC), [Universiti Malaysia Sarawak](#),
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Alfred Russel Wallace and His South-east Asian Heritage

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During his lifetime (8 January 1823 to 7 November 1913), Alfred Russel Wallace was publicly acclaimed as the independent discoverer (as he put it), or co-originator with Charles Darwin, of the theory of evolution by natural selection, first outlined by a joint presentation at a meeting of the Linnean Society on 1 July 1858. In the decade leading up to the centenary of his death, there has been a literary outburst, including new biographies, anthologies, an academic review, journal articles, conferences and debates, radio broadcasts and TV programmes. Several commentators have given ARW primacy in recognising the force of natural selection from observation of variation in wild populations, as opposed to Darwin's approach from domesticated animals. Some have developed a recurrent theme implicitly accusing Darwin of opportunistic plagiarism. Wallace himself consistently gave precedence to Darwin. While including the ringing statement, that "My whole work tends forcibly to illustrate the overwhelming importance of Natural Selection over all other agencies in the production of new species", his final book on the subject, published after Darwin's death, did not retract this opinion.

Significantly, reflecting on his career in old age, Wallace claimed that the eight years (1854-62) spent in the Malay Archipelago "constituted the central and controlling incident of my life". The account of his experiences, *The Malay Archipelago*, has been ranked as the greatest travel book on the region and, in its analysis of the distribution of animals, one of the most important natural history books of the 19th century. His vast collections, chiefly but not exclusively birds and insects, constitute an equally important legacy. Given the abundance of biographical literature, it seems a useful alternative to approach the man through the material legacy of his specimens. This is therefore the line taken in the present offering, with special emphasis on Sarawak both as the venue for this commemorative conference and also as the first island of the Archipelago that Wallace visited, and the location where he spent a longer time and made more remarkable collections than any other place during his travels from 1854 to 1862.
