

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

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**An Inordinate Fondness for Beetles: The Hero's Journey of Alfred Russel Wallace in Southeast Asia**

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Alfred Russel Wallace, a self-described “beetle collector,” spent eight years in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century exploring territories which are now Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia. Wallace caught, skinned and pickled 125,660 specimens of “natural productions” including 212 new species of birds, 900 new species of beetles and 200 new species of ants. Consider just the logistics — how could one man, on a tight budget and without organizational support, often living rough in rainforests, collect, identify, mount, preserve and transport 8,000 bird skins and 100,000 insects? The breadth of his interests raised him to the top tier of scientists, but today he is not widely recognized. He observed that the “natural productions” he found in western Indonesia and Peninsular Malaysia (elephants, tigers, monkeys) were different to those in eastern Indonesia (kangaroos, birds of paradise); this boundary later became known as the Wallace Line. He was both a sentimentalist and a realist -- he adopted an infant orangutan after he shot and killed its mother, and then, when the baby animal died, he calmly boiled the animal's bones in order to obtain a commercially-viable skeleton. He campaigned against: vaccination, vivisection, “flat earth,” gambling, foreign aid, welfare state, “junk” food, sweatshops, “red-tapism,” child labor, women labor in coal mines. He promoted: women's liberation, food and drug controls, income tax, labor unions, food stamps, minimum wage. And what led Wallace to develop his theory of natural selection, first the Sarawak Law (written during the period he spent in Sarawak as the guest of the Rajah James Brooke of Sarawak), and later the famous Ternate Paper in which he outlined the concept “the fittest shall survive.”