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PRESS RELEASE

A kilosteve attained!

A new Darwin inaugurates the third century of evolution.

Steven P. Darwin — Steve #1000

CHICAGO -- It was nip and tuck, but when the dust settled, Dr. Steve Darwin was named the 1000th Steve in NCSE's Project Steve.

The coronation took place at the Improbable Research press conference held as part of the AAAS annual meeting in Chicago this week. Presenting the award were Dr. Eugenie Scott, Executive Director of the National Center for Science Education (NCSE), and Steve Mirsky, long-time writer, columnist, and podcaster for *Scientific American*.

Dr. Steve Darwin -- no relation to Charles -- has been a botanist and evolutionary biologist for over thirty years. Darwin is not only a professor of ecology and evolutionary biology at Tulane University in New Orleans, but also Director of Tulane's herbarium, which boasts 115,000 specimens, with a focus on flora from the southeastern United States. He is the author of thirty-five publications in the field of plant biology.

This 21st-century Darwin has a huge appetite for all things botanical, encompassing botany from the Pacific islands to the Yucatan peninsula, plant systematics, plant phylogenetics and biogeography, botanical exploration and illustration, economic botany, and much more.

When told he was being named Steve #1000, Dr. Darwin felt a thousand emotions, but mostly, he laughed. "This is the first time that being a Darwin -- or a Steve -- has paid off!" says Darwin. "This came to me for reasons entirely beyond my control. I appreciate the honor, but I realize that I'm just a vessel for the name(s) that I carry."

What were the odds of a Darwin being named Steve #1000? "Astronomical!" says Dr. Scott.

Named in honor of Stephen Jay Gould, NCSE's Project Steve began as a tongue-in-cheek response to creationist lists of alleged Darwin-doubting scientists. Project Steve encourages scientists named Steve (or Steven, Stephen, Stephanie, Stefan, Stefano, Etienne, Esteban, Tapani ...) to sign up and publicly support evolution. Because 1% of Americans are named Steve or Stephanie, the 1000 Steves represent the thousands of scientists who affirm and support the study and teaching of evolution.

"It's particularly appropriate that Steve #1000 is from Louisiana," says NCSE's Scott. "There have been many attempts to undermine the teaching of evolution in the state, including a law that required the teaching of creationism alongside evolution, which the Supreme Court struck down in 1987."

"Antievolution attitudes in Louisiana are prevalent," says Darwin, who has taught a popular class on evolution vs. creationism at Tulane for several years. Which is why it wasn't a big surprise to him when Governor Bobby Jindal signed a new antievolution bill into law in 2008. The law allows creationist-minded teachers to discredit evolution using bogus arguments and phony weaknesses -- claims that have long since been debunked by scientists, says Scott.

"Project Steve is a lighthearted stunt -- but it is in reaction to the very serious threat to scientific literacy posed by the relentless efforts of creationists," says Scott. "We urge everybody, whether named Steve or not, to join in defending the teaching of evolution."

Project Steve is sponsored by the National Center for Science Education, a nonprofit organization that defends and promotes the teaching of evolution in the public schools. The NCSE is affiliated with the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

CONTACT: Robert Luhn, Director of Communications, NCSE
510-601-7203, 707-758-6790 (cell), luhn@ncseweb.org [4]

Website: www.ncseweb.org [5]

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The Morphology of Steve

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Dr. Steve P. Darwin's web page

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Tulane Herbarium

http://www.tulane.edu/~darwin/Herbarium/herbarium_index.htm [10]

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