



Published on NCSE (<https://ncse.com>)

[Home](#) > Padian on Darwin's enduring legacy

SHARE TWEET EMAIL [PRINT](#) [1]

[NCSE Staff](#) [2]

02.11.2008

## [Padian on Darwin's enduring legacy](#) [3]

Preparing for the impending bicentennial of Darwin's birth, the journal *Nature* (451: 632-634) commissioned Kevin Padian to [consider](#) [4] (subscription required) Darwin's enduring legacy. "As we prepare to mark next year the 200th anniversary of Darwin's birth and the 150th of the publication of *On the Origin of Species*," Padian writes, "it is an opportune time to reflect on just what constitutes Darwin's enduring greatness in Western thought." He proceeds to discuss ten topics -- natural selection, one tree of life, genealogical classification, selective extinction, deep time, biogeographical distributions, sexual selection, coevolution, economy of nature, and gradual change -- before wondering, "has any single individual made so many lasting contributions to a broad area of science as Darwin did to biology?"

Acknowledging that comparisons are impossible, Padian concluded, "Darwin moved intellectual thought from a paradigm of untestable wonder at special creation to an ability to examine the workings of that natural world, however ultimately formed, in terms of natural mechanisms and historical patterns. He rooted the classification of species within a single branching tree, and so gave systematics a biological, rather than purely philosophical, rationale. He framed most of the important questions that still define our understanding of evolution, from natural selection to sexual selection, and founded the main principles of the sciences of biogeography and ecology. His work is still actively read and discussed today, inspiring new students and scientists all over the world. Few authors can claim so much. ... it is for his innumerable scientific insights, most still as valid and stimulating as the day he coined them, that we look forward to celebrating him next year."

A story by David Perlman about Padian's article [appeared](#) [5] in the *San Francisco Chronicle* (February 11, 2008), beginning, "Exactly one year shy of Charles Darwin's 200th birthday, scientists are looking ahead to the anniversary to call for renewed understanding of the scientist's powerful impact on Western civilization. None of modern biology, no advances in medical research, nor success for the Human

Genome Project, nor the achievements of biotechnology could exist today without the insights first advanced by that reclusive genius of the Victorian era, the scientists agree. Now, a UC Berkeley paleontologist named Kevin Padian argues that the coming bicentennial is the ideal time 'to reflect on just what constitutes Darwin's enduring greatness in Western thought.'" Accompanying the story is a [podcast](#) [6] in which Padian discusses dinosaurs and Darwin with Perlman, the *Chronicle's* science editor.

In addition to serving as president of NCSE's board of directors, Padian is Professor of Integrative Biology at the University of California at Berkeley and also Curator of Paleontology at the University of California's Museum of Paleontology. He [testified](#) [7] for the plaintiffs in *Kitzmiller v. Dover*, the 2005 case establishing the unconstitutionality of teaching "intelligent design" in the public schools. In his [decision](#) [8] (PDF), Judge John E. Jones III wrote, "Dr. Padian's demonstrative slides, prepared on the basis of peer-review[ed] scientific literature, illustrate how Pandas systematically distorts and misrepresents established, important evolutionary principles." He also noted that "Padian bluntly and effectively stated that in confusing students about science generally and evolution in particular, the disclaimer makes students 'stupid.'"

[Science](#) [9]

[2008](#) [10]

[National](#) [11]

[+ read](#) [3]

---

**Source URL:** <https://ncse.com/news/2008/02/padian-darwins-enduring-legacy-001796#comment-0>

#### Links

[1] <https://ncse.com/printpdf/13236>

[2] <https://ncse.com/users/ncse-staff>

[3] <https://ncse.com/news/2008/02/padian-darwins-enduring-legacy-001796>

[4] <http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v451/n7179/full/451632a.html>

[5] <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2008/02/11/BAGBUSGBL.DTL>

[6] [http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/blogs/sfgate/detail?blogid=5&entry\\_id=24072](http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/blogs/sfgate/detail?blogid=5&entry_id=24072)

[7] [http://www2.ncseweb.org/kvd/exhibits/Padian/Padian\\_transcript.html](http://www2.ncseweb.org/kvd/exhibits/Padian/Padian_transcript.html)

[8] [http://www.pamd.uscourts.gov/kitzmiller/kitzmiller\\_342.pdf](http://www.pamd.uscourts.gov/kitzmiller/kitzmiller_342.pdf)

[9] <https://ncse.com/science>

[10] <https://ncse.com/news/2008>

[11] <https://ncse.com/news/national>