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[Home](#) > Project Steve: n > 1000

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[Project Steve: n > 1000](#) [3]



Steve Darwin: The 1000th Steve

With the addition of Steve #1000 on February 12, 2009, NCSE's Project Steve attained the kilosteve mark. A tongue-in-cheek parody of the long-standing creationist tradition of amassing lists of "scientists who doubt evolution" or "scientists who dissent from Darwinism," Project Steve mocks such lists by restricting its signatories to scientists whose first name is Steve. (Cognates are also accepted, such as Stephanie, Esteban, Istvan, Stefano, or even Tapani — the Finnish equivalent.) About 1% of the United States population possesses such a first name, so each signatory represents about 100 potential signatories. ("Steve" was selected in honor of the late Stephen Jay Gould, a Supporter of NCSE and a dauntless defender of evolution education.)

Steve #1000 was announced at the [Improbable Research](#) [4] press conference and crowned at the Improbable Research show, both held on February 13, 2009, as part of the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. NCSE's executive director Eugenie C. Scott and Steve Mirsky, long-time writer, columnist, and podcaster for *Scientific American* presented a commemorative plaque to — of all people — Steven P. Darwin, a professor of ecology and evolutionary biology and director of the herbarium at Tulane University. In a February 14, 2009, press release, Darwin [commented](#) [5], "This is the first time that being a Darwin — or a Steve — has paid off!" Videos of the [press conference](#) [6] and the [award ceremony](#) [7], and a *Scientific American* [podcast](#) [8], are available online.

The fact that Steve #1000 hails from [Louisiana](#) [9] is particularly ironic, since the state recently enacted a law that threatens to open the door for creationism and scientifically unwarranted critiques of evolution to be taught in public school science classes. When a policy implementing the law was drafted, a provision that prohibited the use of materials that teach creationism in the public schools was deleted. Recently, the Society of Integrative and Comparative Biology [announced](#) [10] that, due to the antievolution law, it would not hold its 2011 conference in New Orleans; a spokesperson for the New Orleans Metropolitan Convention and Visitors Bureau [told](#) [11] the weekly *New Orleans City Business* (February 23, 2009) that the city would lose about \$2.7 million as a result of SICB's decision.

Although the idea of Project Steve is frivolous, the statement is serious. It reads, "Evolution is a vital, well-supported, unifying principle of the biological sciences, and the scientific evidence is overwhelmingly in favor of the idea that all living things share a common ancestry. Although there are legitimate debates about the patterns and processes of evolution, there is no serious scientific doubt that evolution occurred or that natural selection is a major mechanism in its occurrence. It is scientifically inappropriate and pedagogically irresponsible for creationist pseudoscience, including but not limited to 'intelligent design,' to be introduced into the science curricula of our nation's public schools."

Highlights from the history of Project Steve include the original [press release](#) [12], Glenn Branch and Skip Evans's [description](#) [13] of the project for *Geotimes*, the [announcement](#) [14] that Steven W. Hawking was Steve #300, the [announcement](#) [15] (on St. Stephen's Day!) of Steve #400, and the announcements of Steves [#600](#) [16], [#700](#) [17], [#800](#) [18], and [#900](#) [19]. And, of course, Project Steve proved to be scientifically fruitful in its own right. "[The Morphology of Steve](#)" [20] (PDF), by Eugenie C. Scott, Glenn Branch, Nick Matzke, and several hundred Steves, appeared in the prestigious *Annals of Improbable Research*; the paper provided "the first scientific analysis of the sex, geographic location, and body size of scientists named Steve."

Currently, there are 1046 signatories to Project Steve, including 100% of eligible Nobel laureates (Steven Weinberg and Steven Chu), 100% of eligible members of President Obama's Cabinet (Steven Chu, the Secretary of Energy), at least ten members of the National Academy of Sciences, the authors of widely used textbooks such as *Molecular Biology of the Gene*, *Psychology: An Evolutionary Approach*, and *Introduction to Organic Geochemistry*, and the authors of popular science books such as *A Brief History of Time*, *Why We Age*, and *Darwin's Ghost*. When last surveyed in February 2006, 54% of the signatories work in the biological sciences proper; 61% work in related fields in the life sciences.

Additionally, Project Steve appeared in Steven Pinker's recent book, *The Stuff of Thought: Language as a Window into Human Nature* (Viking, 2007). Pinker, himself a single-digit Steve, described it as "the most formidable weapon in the fight against neo-creationism today," adding, "Part satire, part memorial to Stephen Jay Gould, the project maintains a Steve-O-Meter (now pointing past 800) and has spun off a T-shirt, a song, a mascot (Professor Steve Steve, a panda puppet), and a paper in the respected scientific journal *Annals of Improbable Research* called 'The Morphology of Steve' (based on the T-shirt sizes ordered by the signatories)."

[NCSE](#) [21]

[2009](#) [22]

[+ read](#) [3]

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Links

[1] <https://ncse.com/printpdf/13359>

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

[3] <https://ncse.com/news/2009/02/project-steve-n-1000-004625>

[4] <http://improbable.com/>

[5] <https://ncse.com/news/2009/02/steve-darwin-is-steve-1000-004308>

[6] <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AXEGfi9t7yU>

[7] <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cgZTrdZL2Go>

[8] <http://www.sciam.com/podcast/episode.cfm?id=count-on-steves-to-defend-darwin-09-02-20>

[9] <https://ncse.com/news/louisiana>

[10] <https://ncse.com/news/2009/02/major-biology-conference-shuns-louisiana-004312>

- [11] <http://www.neworleanscitybusiness.com/viewStory.cfm?recID=32768>
- [12] <https://ncse.com/taking-action/project-steve-press-release>
- [13] <http://www.geotimes.org/may03/column.html>
- [14] <https://ncse.com/news/2003/04/hawking-is-steve-300-00459>
- [15] <https://ncse.com/news/2003/12/project-steve-update-00463>
- [16] <https://ncse.com/news/2005/09/project-steve-n-600-00766>
- [17] <https://ncse.com/news/2006/02/announcing-ncse-700-club-001003>
- [18] <https://ncse.com/news/2007/04/project-steve-n-800-001158>
- [19] <https://ncse.com/news/2008/09/project-steve-n-900-002307>
- [20] <http://improbable.com/pages/airchives/paperair/volume10/v10i4/morph-steve-10-4.pdf>
- [21] <https://ncse.com/ncse>
- [22] <https://ncse.com/news/2009>