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NCSE conferred its Friend of Darwin award for 2018 upon two people—Robert Stephens and Tiffany Adrain—who have significantly contributed to efforts to increase the public’s understanding and appreciation of evolutionary biology in informal educational settings.

Robert Stephens, Molecular Biologist

As a cell and molecular biologist by trade, Robert Stephens was always understandably appreciative of

Charles Darwin's contributions to science. In 1993, however, he took the further step of proposing the celebration of Darwin Day, securing funds and helping to organize the first Darwin Day event at Stanford University in 1995, with a keynote address from the discoverer of "Lucy," Donald C. Johanson.



To be sure, there were independent inventions of similar events before and after, such as Salem State University's annual Darwin Festival, which [began](#) [5] in 1980. But Stephens distinctively saw the need to develop Darwin Day "into an annual, national and eventually international event as a way of educating the general public about the importance of Darwin's legacy," as he [told](#) [6] Humanist Network News.

Accordingly, Stephens, along with Amanda Chesworth and Massimo Pigliucci, formed a non-profit organization to ensure the continuance of Darwin Day celebrations and to promote and coordinate the events; it was eventually absorbed by the American Humanist Association, which now promotes and coordinates [International Darwin Day](#) [7]. (Parallel events in houses of worship occur via [Evolution Weekend](#) [8].)

Darwin Day is now celebrated by colleges and universities, schools, libraries, museums, churches, civic groups, and just plain folks across the country—and around the world—seeking to honor Darwin's legacy and to engage in public outreach about science, evolution, and the importance of evolution education. And there are few who have been so important to its flourishing as Robert Stephens.

Tiffany Adrain, Collections Manager of the University of Iowa Paleontology Repository

When Emily Schoerning started to pilot NCSE's [Science Booster Club program](#) [9] in eastern Iowa in 2015, she visited the University of Iowa's [Museum of Natural History](#) [10] in the hope of finding someone who might have a scintilla of interest in helping to support informal evolution education in local communities. She wasn't expecting to find someone as enthusiastic, energetic, and excited as Tiffany Adrain.



Scarcely a month after Schoerning’s visit to the museum, Adrain was already a pillar of the fledgling Science Booster Club in Iowa City, showing incredible generosity, both with her time and with the specimens that she curates. “If you want to attract people to a community science event about evolution, there’s nothing quite like a [mastodon femur](#) [11],” Schoerning joked.

The collections manager of the University of Iowa Paleontology Repository, Adrain is nearing thirty years of work in museum collections and conducting public outreach on evolution at the University of Iowa, and, before that, at the Natural History Museum in London. So even before she began her collaboration with NCSE, she already shared NCSE’s goal of promoting the understanding of evolution.

As NCSE continues the national expansion of the Science Booster Club program—now with clubs active in Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Maryland, Ohio, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia as well as Iowa—it seems entirely appropriate to honor Tiffany Adrain’s invaluable contributions, both to the Science Booster Clubs and to the cause of the public understanding of evolution in general.

Despite their different approaches taken in different venues, Stephens and Adrain clearly share a deep appreciation for evolution and a desire to share their delight with the world. NCSE is pleased to recognize them with the Friend of Darwin award for 2018.

Photograph of Robert Stephens by Sena Havasy.

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