

## Inauguration Darwin Study Hall – Septembre 17, 2021 at 2PM

Mr. Dean, dear friends and colleagues,

I am happy to welcome you today in the *Darwin Study Hall*, a space that we hope you will find friendly, warm, aesthetic and, dare we say it, prestigious ! This space was poorly exploited since it housed archives and various obsolete materials. My hope is that the Darwin Study Hall will become a key location at the Division of Biology to study and write articles or discuss scientific topics in small groups. This explains why we have set up tables but also seating areas and a blackboard to stimulate formal scientific debate. The screen on which I am showing you these few slides, however, will disappear after the inauguration because the Darwin Study Hall is certainly not a seminar room.

I also hope that the Hall will become a privileged space to showcase the Division of Biology to our external guests. It seemed to us indeed unfortunate not to have the possibility of discussing in a prestigious place with our colleagues from Tuebingen, Dresden, Cambridge, Harvard, Stanford, Tokyo or Sydney. The wall screen at the entrance of the Darwin Study Hall will allow us to present the Biology Division and Departments through videos and other silent visual aids, so as not to disturb users of the place. In a few minutes, we'll be showing the Biology Division's brand new promotional film, which will probably be publicly released next week.

The mosaic at the entrance of the Hall is there to highlight the prestigious past of Biology in Geneva, reminding us that our predecessors made fundamental biological discoveries, founded new disciplines and invented essential molecular tools. The Division of Biology is proud to continue the tradition of innovation and interdisciplinarity present in Geneva for nearly three centuries. You will have noticed that many photos taken with the most modern imaging methods are shown alongside old illustrations to remind us that, if technologies evolve rapidly, many subjects studied today within the Division of Biology are closely linked to questions analysed by our predecessors.

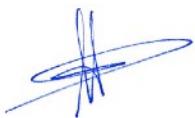
We are inaugurating this space at a time when we all have a particular need to recreate links and to break free from the barriers that have hampered our exchanges over the past two years. I hope that all the academic members of the Section (academic members in the broad sense: from doctoral students to Professors) will appropriate this space while respecting the few rules that you will find in the Hall rules.

Why is this place of study and discussion dedicated to Charles Darwin? We could have an endless debate about the many scientists, men and women, who deserve to be celebrated. However, it seems to us that no one deserves as much as Charles Darwin to be considered as the person who most influenced all biological disciplines through the development of concepts that apply to the entire living world, from unicellular to higher plants and animals. As Theodosius Dobzhansky wrote in his famous 1973 essay: *Nothing in Biology Makes Sense Except in the Light of Evolution*.

I would like to end this short speech with thanks to all the people who worked on the design and construction of the Darwin Study Hall: Grégory Loichot (particularly for the design and realisation of the mosaic at the entrance to the Hall), Audrey Bellier (who was also, with Grégory, the project manager of the new promotional film of the Biology Division), Françoise Stutz, Ghislaine Wharton, Athanasia Tzika, Adrien Debry, Florent Montange, Nicolas Antille, Bruno Strasser, Christoph Droux, Thierry Sermier, Pascal Gobet ... without forgetting Isabelle Fleury for her invaluable help in the selection and supply of the magnificent plants that you see around you. I would also like to thank the three Directors of Departments, Françoise Stutz, Ivan Rodriguez, and Roman Ulm, for their very strong support for this project.

And to finish, I suggest we watch together, first a mini-clip directed by Grégory Loichot for today's inauguration, and then the brand new promotional film of the Division of Biology which was, in part, shot here in the Darwin Study Hall.

Thank you all for coming and I wish you to enjoy very much the Darwin Study Hall for years to come.



Prof. Michel C. Milinkovitch  
President of the Division of Biology  
Faculty of Sciences, University of Geneva.