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## **Smithsonian Exhibit Invites Visitors to View “Orchids Through Darwin’s Eyes”**

The Smithsonian’s Horticulture Services Division and the U.S. Botanic Garden will open the 15th annual orchid exhibit, “Orchids Through Darwin’s Eyes,” at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History on Saturday, Jan. 24. The exhibit will display more than 300 plants representing 50 varieties of orchids. Charles Darwin’s work on orchid reproduction and evolution will be featured in celebration of the 150th anniversary of the publication of “On the Origin of Species” and his 200th birthday. The exhibit continues until April 26.

“Orchids Through Darwin’s Eyes” will introduce visitors to Darwin’s evolutionary research through live orchid displays, excerpts from his writings, a family tree of orchid genealogy and recent evolutionary discoveries related to the orchid family. A fossilized bee specimen with the pollinia, or pollen packet, of an extinct orchid will also be on display.

“The Smithsonian’s annual orchid exhibits are a terrific opportunity for us to expose the public to the exotic and fascinating world of orchids,” says Tom Mirenda, museum specialist for the Orchid Collection. “These beautiful and extraordinary flowers have captivated many great scientific thinkers, including Charles Darwin.”

The orchid family, Orchidaceae, is one of the largest and oldest families of flowering plants. An estimated 25,000 species live in almost every type of environment and continent, except Antarctica. The most diverse examples of the species can be found in tropical forests. Many orchids have evolved to attract only one specific pollinator, going as far as to deceive this pollinator, either by mimicking a potential mate or potential food.

### **Family Festival**

Visitors of all ages will be able to explore the world of orchids at the “Orchid Exhibit Family Festival” Feb. 28 from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the National Museum of Natural History. The Smithsonian’s Horticulture Services Division and the U.S. Botanic Garden will offer free activities in

conjunction with the exhibition. Visitors will be able to participate in a fossilizing activity, get temporary orchid tattoos and pot their own orchid.

### **Smithsonian's Horticulture Services Division**

The Horticulture Services Division has been entrusted with the design and management of the Smithsonian's grounds and interior plant displays in Washington, D.C. since 1972. It develops and maintains permanent garden displays, manages horticulture collections and produces plant-related exhibitions. The Smithsonian Orchid Collection, which began in 1974, includes several thousand hybrid and species orchids. The Horticulture Services Division also maintains a photographic garden archive and a historic garden furnishings collection.

### **U.S. Botanic Garden**

The U.S. Botanic Garden is an institution of public education dedicated to demonstrating the aesthetic, cultural, economic, therapeutic and ecological importance of plants to the well-being of humankind. Its orchid collection includes more than 12,000 plants representing 900 genera. The Botanic Garden is under the administration of the Architect of the Capitol.

For more information on "Orchids Through Darwin's Eyes," visit [www.gardens.si.edu](http://www.gardens.si.edu).

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