

The fossil record is complete enough

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Ever since Darwin wrote the *Origin of the Species*, evolutionists have regarded the fossil record as vastly incomplete. To their mind, the fossil record is the actual record of past life in which evolution should be obvious. Darwin believed that the fossil record should be full of transitional fossils and blamed the lack of such fossils on the extreme imperfection of the fossil record:

“But just in proportion as this process of extermination has acted on an enormous scale, so must the number of intermediate varieties, which have formerly existed, be truly enormous. Why then is not every geological formation and every stratum full of such intermediate links? Geology assuredly does not reveal any such finely-graduated organic chain; and this, perhaps, is the most obvious and serious objection which can be urged against the theory. The explanation lies, as I believe, in the extreme imperfection of the geological record.”¹

Numerous secular scientists after Darwin have continued to use this excuse that the fossil record is vastly incomplete. For instance, renowned evolutionist Stephen Jay Gould wrote:

“All paleontologists know that the fossil record contains precious little in the way of intermediate forms; transitions between major groups are characteristically abrupt. Gradualists usually extract themselves from this dilemma by invoking the extreme imperfection of the fossil record.”²

Most scientists have heard of the imperfection of the fossil record, and paleontologists

“... have underscored and emphasized Darwin’s point for the past 150 years by routinely highlighted incompleteness and bias. And if bias was not good enough at scaring off the biologists, we have added megabias.”³

The fossil record is essentially complete

Scientists have had more than 160 more years to collect fossils. Evolution should be obvious within the fossil record by now. Steven Holland points out that the fossil record is imperfect in a sense, but really nearly complete. It is imperfect in that it did not record every organism that has ever lived. So, “all data sets are incomplete”,³ and he believes we need to “take a different path”.³

First of all, we need to recognize that the imperfection of the fossil record is exaggerated:

“Our exaggerated emphasis on the imperfection of the fossil record feeds the perception among scientists in general that the fossil record is an unusually poor data set. It isn’t. ... We already know much about the structure of the fossil record.”⁴

Holland recommends that paleontologists should not emphasize the incompleteness of the fossil record any more, although not ignoring it completely.

Second, Holland contends that instead of concluding, as many do, that the fossil record is not worth considering, scientists should ‘embrace’ it along with the sedimentary record, and work with it. The fossil record is better than most scientists recognize, since “We know much about the structure of the fossil record.”⁵ Not only do paleontologists know the structure of the fossil record, but also that it provides a good record of species richness:

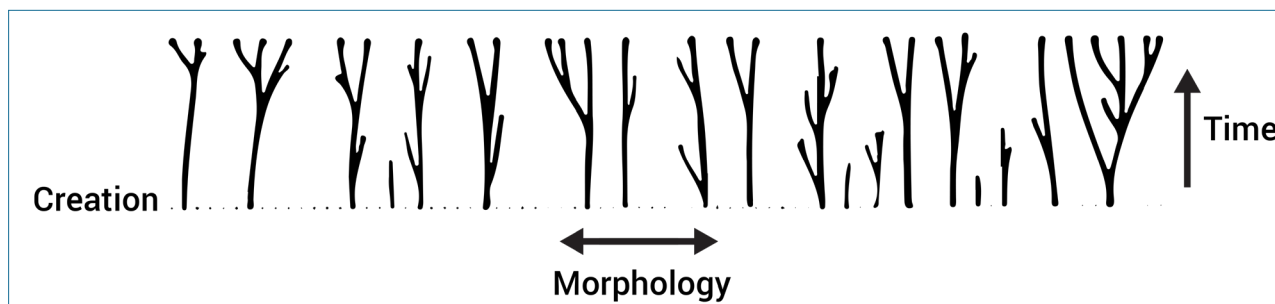


Figure 1. The creation orchard of life

“Through her comprehensive examinations of live-dead comparisons, Susan Kidwell (2002, 2013) showed the fossil record contains a high-fidelity record of species richness and especially abundance, a pattern both unexpected and most welcome.”⁵

Holland praises the fossil record as a record of past life:

“As paleontologists, we have an extraordinary data set at our disposal, and we have the expertise to understand it. We have something that no other field of biology has—time, deep time—and we need to play to that strength. We have access to worlds far different from our own, with biotas, geographies, and climates unlike anyone has seen.”⁵

I agree that paleontologists and scientists in general need to embrace the fossil record and accept the fossil record for what it is saying today. But doing so raises a conundrum for the evolutionist: the higher-fidelity the record of species richness the fossil record is, the less evolutionists can appeal to the incompleteness of the fossil record to explain away the morphological gaps between fossil taxa. So, if the fossil record is so good, why have these gaps not been filled after 160 years more of collecting fossils, if evolution is true? The lack of intermediates, the gaps, are not only real and universal, but they are even more glaring after so many years of digging up fossils.⁶ Michael Denton documents that 100,000 taxon-defining novelties

are “not led up to gradually from some antecedent form, and which remain invariant after their actualization for vast periods of time.”⁷ The glaring, universal gaps in the fossil record should easily be enough to reject evolution, but paleontologists and many other scientists rarely draw this conclusion, likely because of a previous commitment to naturalism and evolution.

The fossil record is nearly complete due to Flood burial

From a biblical creation point of view, the Flood buried the pre-Flood world. We would expect sudden appearance of different kinds of fossils followed by stasis, unlike what is expected for evolution. Therefore, we would expect the fossil record to be complete, except for that small number of new fossils that are being discovered every year. These fossils do not change the nature of the fossil record; it contains universal gaps that can be explained by the creation orchard of life (figure 1). The fossil record is just what is expected from a biblical perspective: an original creation of different kinds described in Genesis 1, with much variety within the kinds both at creation and at the end of the pre-Flood era.

References

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