

U.K. marks Darwin's 200th birthday with pride, humor

BY RAPHAEL G. SATTER

The Associated Press

LONDON — They threw him a party at the Natural History Museum, they trotted out a set of stamps in his honor and a zoo offered free admission to anyone sporting a beard in recognition of his famous facial hair.

While more than 600 events took place worldwide Thursday to commemorate "Darwin Day" — the 200th anniversary of scientist Charles Darwin's birth — it was a particularly special occasion in his native land.

Darwin enjoys a special pride of place in Britain, where his face adorns the 10-pound note. In a message to Parliament, British Culture Secretary Andy Burnham called the



Two Cathedral guides walk toward the grave of Charles Darwin at Westminster Abbey, in London. **Alastair Grant/AP**

scientist "one of the most influential Britons of all time."

On the Net

<http://darwin-online.org.uk/>

The British are celebrating his birthday with commemorations, lectures — and a good dose of home-grown irreverence. Bristol's zoo offered free entry to anyone sporting a beard, whether real or fake — an homage to Darwin's big bushy white whiskers.

"We had beards of all different colors, shapes and sizes," zoo spokeswoman Lucy Parkinson said. "It was a bit of fun, but also a nod to Darwin" — whose cottony beard fills the 19th century photographs of the aging scientist.

Amid all the celebration, a note of skepticism: A poll compiled by ComRes

showed that as many as 43 percent of all Britons believed in "young earth creation" — or the idea that God created the world within the past 10,000 years. An even greater percentage thought "Intelligent Design," or the idea that evolution was not alone enough to explain the origin of some living things, was or might be true.

The poll of 2,060 adults was carried out in October 2008. A margin of error was not given, but samples of that size typically have a margin of error of about 2 or 3 percent.

None of that took the wind out of Thursday's commemorations.

At Westminster Abbey, the final resting place for Britain's great and good, a solemn ceremony was

held at Darwin's tomb with Anglican prayers sung at the simple white headstone in the massive cathedral's nave. Canon Nicholas Sagovsky was to lay flowers and foliage picked from Darwin's family home in southern England.

In Christ's College at Cambridge, where the scientist studied, the Duke of Edinburgh unveiled a bronze statue showing a young, intense-looking Darwin sitting on the arm of a bench.

His great-great-granddaughter, botanist Sarah Darwin, posed next to the statue for pictures.

Elsewhere, it was back to cakes and parties, including Darwin's west England birthplace of Shrewsbury.

London's Natural His-

tory Museum said it was offering visitors "Darwin's birthday soup" — a pea-based broth based on a recipe from Darwin's wife's cook book — along with the more traditional birthday cake. The museum was also showing film and holding special exhibits in its Marine Invertebrates Gallery. Those who missed the soup can still see the exhibit: the "Darwin Show" is billed as the largest exhibition ever devoted to the naturalist. It runs until April.

Celebrations in Britain were accompanied by events around the world, but for those who missed his birthday, never fear: Darwin's complete publications and 20,000 private papers are available online.