

Nelson Boys and Tauranga Girls win top prizes for DVDs on evolution



The major prizes in the Freemasons BIG Science Adventures DVD competition for year 11–13 students have gone to teams from Nelson Boys College and Tauranga Girls College. Their films on the theme of evolution have won them, respectively, trips to the UK and the sub-Antarctic islands, the latter with the Royal New Zealand Navy. The UK itinerary will take the Nelson Boys, Ross Inness–McLeish, Jack Tippler and Oliver Neas, to all the places that were important in Darwin's life, including Shrewsbury and Edinburgh. The Tauranga girls, Brittany Smith–Frank, Holly Woulfe, and Chloe O'Shea, will need good sea legs for their very special trip in December to Campbell, Auckland and Adam Islands, where they will get a taste of life on earth on one of the few places without human habitation.

The theme of Darwin and evolution was chosen by the Royal Society of New Zealand, which administers the competition, to mark the 150th anniversary of the Wallace–Darwin paper on natural selection. It was read to the Linnaean Society in London on 1 July 1858, and *On The Origin of Species* was published the following year. There will be an international celebration next year to mark this, and the 200th anniversary of Darwin's birth.

The video produced by the Nelson team, *Finding Time*, explained how Ernest Rutherford's understanding of radioactivity underpinned Darwin's theory by showing that the Earth was indeed old enough for the slow processes of evolution to have occurred. Previous estimates of the age of the Earth had been wildly short of the mark. Judges were unanimous in praise of their interesting, professional, and highly effective account of one of Rutherford's many great contributions to science. Rutherford was a former pupil of Nelson College, making their choice of topic an easy one.

The Tauranga Girls used different coloured M&Ms to illustrate how natural selection works; an impressively simple visual device, according to the judges. Their video investigated the evolution of New Zealand's unique plants and animals and the effects of the arrival of humans. The judges noted the brilliant introduction and some of the best animal cinematography in the competition.

Both teams were among the six finalists in the competition last year. Chief Executive of the Royal Society of New Zealand, Dr Di McCarthy, who travelled to the schools to surprise students with the news, said, "I am impressed, not only with the superb quality of their videos, but the fact that both teams got over their huge disappointment at just missing out on the big prize last year, and came back with even greater determination. They really deserve to win, and I'm sure that they will make the most of their very special trips."

The other finalist teams were:

Highly commended

Christchurch Rudolf Steiner School
Jerome Reil, Leeya Warrander, Rasa Cowie–Cloesen

John McGlasan College, Dunedin
Mat Darling, Eric, Kim, Hamish Russell

Unlimited Paenga Tawhiti, Christchurch
Finn Davis, Robyn Farrell, Woodrow Wilby

Christchurch Rudolf Steiner School
Eugene Lee, Chloe Rose, Molly Barrington

Waitaki Girls' High
Erin Ryder, Natasha Scott, Lisa Whalley

Timaru Boys High School
Ryan Ammar, Adam Simpson, Matt Keelty

Commended

Nelson College
Finn Lawrence, Cam Richards, Moss Bowering–Scott

Columba College, Dunedin
Ava Atkinson–Barclay, Sophie Bang, Sandy Chu

Te Kauwhata College, Waikato
Wesley Twiss, Colin Pilbrow, Gaylene Mulligan

Rongotai College, Wellington
Oliver Connew, Joshua Wright, Michael Yung

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