

Scientific Emperor holds Attenborough's attention

Mark Henderson

Science Editor

The tour may have taken in five countries and culminated in a banquet with the Queen, but the centrepiece event took place not at Buckingham Palace, but in a small room in Burlington House in Piccadilly, Central London, where he had been invited to address the Linnean Society of London.

Emperor Akihito specialises

in taxonomy (the classification of species) and Carl Linnaeus is one of his intellectual heroes.

He delivered the tercentenary address yesterday — Linnaeus was born 300 years ago this month — in front of portraits of Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace, pioneers of evolutionary theory who drew on Linnaeus's work. The Emperor described the history of binomial classification and its introduction to Japan,

and discussed his own research into goby fish.

The Emperor also told an audience of about 100 scientists, including Sir David Attenborough and Richard Fortey, a palaeontologist at the Natural History Museum, that taxonomy was undergoing a profound change.

"I think that the analysis of mitochondrial DNAs will open up great possibilities of discovering new species which cannot

be distinguished morphologically, but which can be clearly distinguished at a molecular biological level," he said.

Sir David said that the Emperor's interest in the subject highlighted the importance of taxonomy, an unfashionable discipline that is fundamental to biology and conservation.

"Linnean classification is the foundation stone of modern taxonomy, and zoology would not exist without taxonomy,"

he said. "It is vitally important to conservation. You can't know what is flourishing and disappearing unless you can recognise it first. It has to be classified and named."

Dr Fortey, responding on behalf of the Linnean Society, said that the work of taxonomists would be critical to preserving biodiversity against threats such as the rising human population and global warming.

Palace smalltalk problem solved royal guest is a goby fish fanatic

Alan Hamilton

While his people still dine on whale, Emperor Akihito of Japan was fed a less politically sensitive partridge when he was entertained by the Queen at Buckingham Palace last night.

It was a modest occasion, with 16 guests around a table in the 1844 Room, named after a visit by Tsar Nicholas I of Russia in that year. It last made the news in 2001, when the Queen gave lunch there to George and Laura Bush during the President's official visit to London.

Akihito and his wife, Empress Michiko, are on a ten-day tour of European capitals, and are making a brief, semi-private visit to London for the Emperor to deliver a lecture to the Linnean Society, which honours Carl Linnaeus, the 18th-century Swedish scientist who invented taxonomy, the now-universal method of classifying species of plants and animals.

The Emperor is an honorary member of the society and is a world authority — possibly the only authority — on classifying the goby fish. Even in the modern world, Japanese emperors lead lives of stultifying regulation, and must find intellectual stimulation where they can.

The Empress, who at 72 is a year younger than her husband, shocked Japan recently when she broke the iron bonds of protocol and told a press conference in Tokyo of the sorrow and anxiety she had experienced as the first commoner to marry into the Imperial Family. The internal bleeding and mouth ulcers from which she suffered in March were said to be the result of mental fatigue.

Last night's dinner was as informal as it could get when the House of Windsor entertains the Chrysanthemum Throne, which claims to be the world's oldest royal house with origins beyond recorded Japanese history. The Emperor, who ascended the throne in 1989 on the death of his father, is the 125th holder of the post; the Queen is a mere *arriviste* by comparison, being only the 40th monarch since William the Conqueror.

The Queen sat with the Emperor, the Duke of Edinburgh with the Empress; the other guests were from the two households' retinues, along with the Japanese Ambassador to Lon-



Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko of Japan leave the Linnean Society in Piccadilly after the Emperor delivered his speech

A tale of two families

- Akihito is the 125th Emperor of the world's oldest surviving monarchy. Elizabeth II is the 40th monarch since William the Conqueror

- Stuart kings claimed to rule by Divine Right. Japanese emperors were regarded as gods until 1945 when the Americans told Hirohito to drop his divine status or face a war crimes tribunal

- The Queen is head of state. Akihito is "Symbol of the State" with fewer powers

- Elizabeth II is England's fifth female monarch. The Japanese constitution will still not allow a female Empress.

- Japanese taxpayers fund the Emperor and 22 family members. Only the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh are funded directly by the State

- Since 1945 the Imperial Family have had no significant private wealth and own no property. Balmoral and Sandringham are owned by

the Queen, who is worth an estimated £45 million

- The Imperial Household has a state-funded staff of 1,100. The Royal Household employs 470 on public funds

- Buckingham Palace is open to the public eight weeks a year; the Imperial Palace for only two days

- The last Mori poll showed 73 per cent of Britons think the Queen does a good job. In Japan about 80 per cent approve of the Emperor

don and his wife, and Sir Peter Ricketts, the permanent under-secretary of state at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

It was a lounge-suit occasion, not the time for Akihito to wear the insignia of the Order of the Garter, which the Queen gave him during his state visit in 1998; nor for the Queen to sport the yellow sash of the Order of the Chrysanthemum, with which Akihito's father, the

wartime Emperor Hirohito, presented to her during his state visit to London in 1971.

On that occasion the Emperor was greeted by silent crowds, barely quarter of a century after the end of the Second World War. When his son Akihito visited London in 1998 he received a warmer reception, but was still greeted by demonstrations by former Japanese prisoners of war demand-

ing an apology. The Queen has not been back to Japan since she paid a state visit to Hirohito in 1975. Given the respective ages of the two monarchs, they have probably enjoyed their last state banquet together, and perhaps their last opportunity to discuss the goby fish.

 View pictures and post your comments
timesonline.co.uk/asia

Dinner menu for the Emperor of Japan

Buckingham Palace, Tuesday,
May 29, 2007

*Salade de Langoustines
et Bavaoïs d'Asperges*
Salad of Langoustines and
Asparagus

Perdreau Poêlé aux Fèves
Partridge with Broad Beans
Chou Rouge Braisé
Braised Red Cabbage
Légumes Rôtis
Pommes Dauphinoises
Salade

Sablé aux Fraises
Strawberries layered with
Shortbread
Coulis de Framboises
Raspberry Coulis

Les vins
Chablis Grand Cru Vaudésin
Prieuré Saint-Côme 2002
Château Latour à
Pomerol 1995
Château Coutet, Barsac 1996
Royal Vintage 1963