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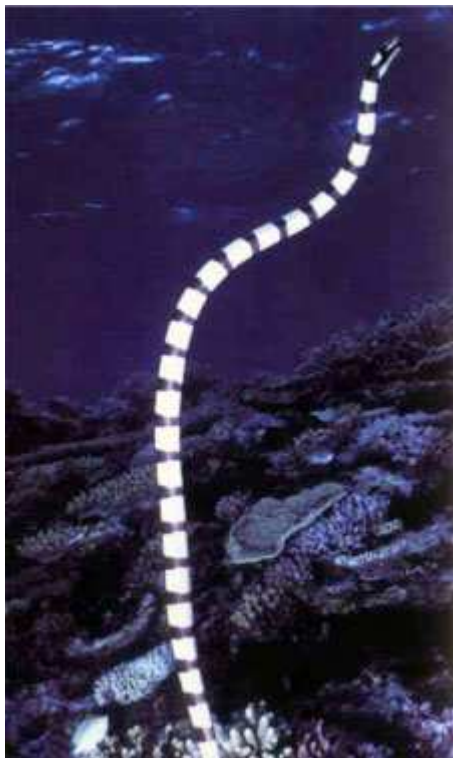
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## [UPDATED] Venomous Snakes, Slippery Eels and Harun Yahya

by Richard Dawkins

In 2006, I was one of tens of thousands of academic scientists all around the world who received, unsolicited and completely free, a huge and lavishly illustrated book called *Atlas of Creation* by the Turkish Muslim apologist **Harun Yahya**. The thesis of the book, which was published in eleven languages, is that evolution is false. The main 'evidence' consists of page after page of beautiful photographs of fossil animals, each one accompanied by a modern counterpart that is said to have changed not at all since the time of the fossil. It is a large-format book, a thick coffee-table book with more than 700 high-gloss colour pages. The cost of production of such a book must have been extremely high, and one is bound to wonder where the money came from to produce it and then distribute it gratis in so many copies and so many languages.



Given that the entire message of the book depends upon the alleged resemblance between modern animals and their fossil counterparts, I was amused, when I began flicking through at random, to find page 468 devoted to "eels", one fossil and one modern. The caption says,

There are more than 400 species of eels in the order *Anguilliformes*. That they have not undergone any change in millions of years once again reveals the invalidity of the theory of evolution.

The fossil eel shown may well be an eel, I cannot tell. But the modern "eel" that Yahya pictures (see left) is undoubtedly not an eel but a sea snake, probably of the highly venomous genus *Laticauda* (an eel is, of course, not a snake at all but a teleost fish). I have not scanned the book for other inaccuracies of this kind. But given that this was almost the first page I looked at . . . what price the main thesis of the book that modern animals are unchanged since the time of their fossil counterparts?

Incidentally, in May 2008 Harun Yahya, whose real name is Adnan Oktar, was sentenced in a Turkish court to a three-year prison sentence "for creating an illegal organization for personal gain."

### Postscript added 8th July

I have now looked at some more pages of this preposterous book. The double page spreads on page 54-55, 368-369, and 414-415 are all labelled 'Crinoid', and all purport to show how similar ancient fossil crinoids are to modern ones. Crinoids are stalked relatives of starfish, members of the phylum Echinodermata. The three spreads have almost identical captions. Here's the one on page 54:

The 345-million-year-old crinoid fossil, identical to its living counterparts, invalidates the theory of

evolution. Crinoids that have remained unchanged for 345 million years refute the theory of evolution, manifesting the creation of God as a fact.

And all three spreads show a beautiful colour photograph of modern crinoids to illustrate the point. Except that, in all three cases, the modern animal pictured is not a crinoid. It isn't even an echinoderm. It isn't even a deuterostome (the sub-kingdom to which the echinoderms, and we, belong). Zoologist readers will recognize it as a tube-dwelling annelid worm, a sabellid.

On page 402, there are four fossil pictures, correctly labelled Brittlestar. The brittlestars are one of the major classes of echinoderms, others being starfish, sea urchins and crinoids. Once again, we have the standard-issue creationist caption:

This 180-million—year-old fossil reveals that brittlestars have been the same for 200 million years. These animals, no different to those living today, once again reveal the invalidity of evolution.



Here we have not one but two photographs of living animals to illustrate the lack of change since the fossils. One of these modern animals is indeed a brittlestar. The other is a starfish! Member of a completely different class of echinoderms and obviously very different to even the meanest glance.

Finally, **PZ has already called attention to this on Pharyngula**, but I include a picture for completeness. On page 244, Yahya wishes to say that caddis flies have not changed since some 25-million-year-old insects preserved in amber. Once again, the caption:

These living things have survived for millions of years without the slightest change in their structures. The fact that these insects never changed is a sign that they never evolved.



By now, we have come to expect something pretty good when we look at the photograph of the modern animal. What will the modern 'caddis fly' be? A minnow, perhaps? A garden slug? A king prawn? No, in a way is better than any of these: A fishing lure, complete with prominent steel hook!

I am at a loss to reconcile the expensive and glossy production values of this book with the "breathtaking inanity" of the content . Is it really inanity, or is it just plain laziness – or perhaps cynical awareness of the ignorance and stupidity of the target audience – mostly Muslim creationists. And where does the money come from?

*Written especially for RichardDawkins.net*

Also see:

**'Forbidden Music' post on Yahya**

**Fishing lure photos taken from Graham Owen Fly Tying**

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