

Dispersal of continental vertebrates during the Paleogene: Preface

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The present volume of *Geologica Belgica* is the result of contributions presented at the 4th international *Geologica Belgica* meeting “Moving plates and melting icecaps - Processes and forcing factors in geology” that was held at the Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences (RBINS) in Brussels from September 11 to 14, 2012. It includes an initial contribution by the organizers concerning the main results of the congress itself. This is then followed by 12 contributions focused on “Dispersal of continental vertebrates during the Paleogene”. Each paper was accepted after peer review by experts in the scientific domain. Nine of the papers were presented in session 8 of the congress under the title “Dispersal of land vertebrates during the Paleogene”. One was presented in session 9 “Evolution of eukaryotes through time” and two others related to the same general topic have been added during the editing process of this volume.

It was in 1996 that Pierre Bultynck officially registered in the Action plan of the RBINS the study of key events in mammalian history, including the evolutionary radiation of the main groups of extant mammals. This revived an old tradition focused on the knowledge of the continental Paleogene sedimentary deposits of Belgium and their vertebrate faunas, which was initiated by famous geologists and paleontologists such as Aimé Rutot, Maurice Leriche, Louis Dollo, and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (Rutot, 1881; Rutot & Van Den Broek, 1884; Leriche, 1902; Dollo, 1909, 1923; Dollo & Teilhard de Chardin, 1924; Teilhard de Chardin, 1927).

Since 1999, the Belgian Science Policy Office (Belspo) has supported research on Paleogene vertebrate evolution and dispersals through different funded projects. This has allowed the present editors to work together and to invite young researchers to join us in this exciting field of study with the main goal of developing an understanding of the evolution of modern global faunas, including the origin of humans, that initially started at the dawn of the Cenozoic. Long term projects allowing the recruitment of PhD students and Postdoc researchers have been supported on one side by the directorate “Research program” of Belspo. On the other side, the directorate “Interfederal and

International Coordination” has allowed the development of bilateral cooperation projects with China including fieldwork and network projects with India including exchanges of researchers. In addition to more than 50 papers already published on the subject since 1999, new results are here presented showing that several continents still have many important secrets to reveal that will contribute to a more complete understanding of when and how the modern world began.

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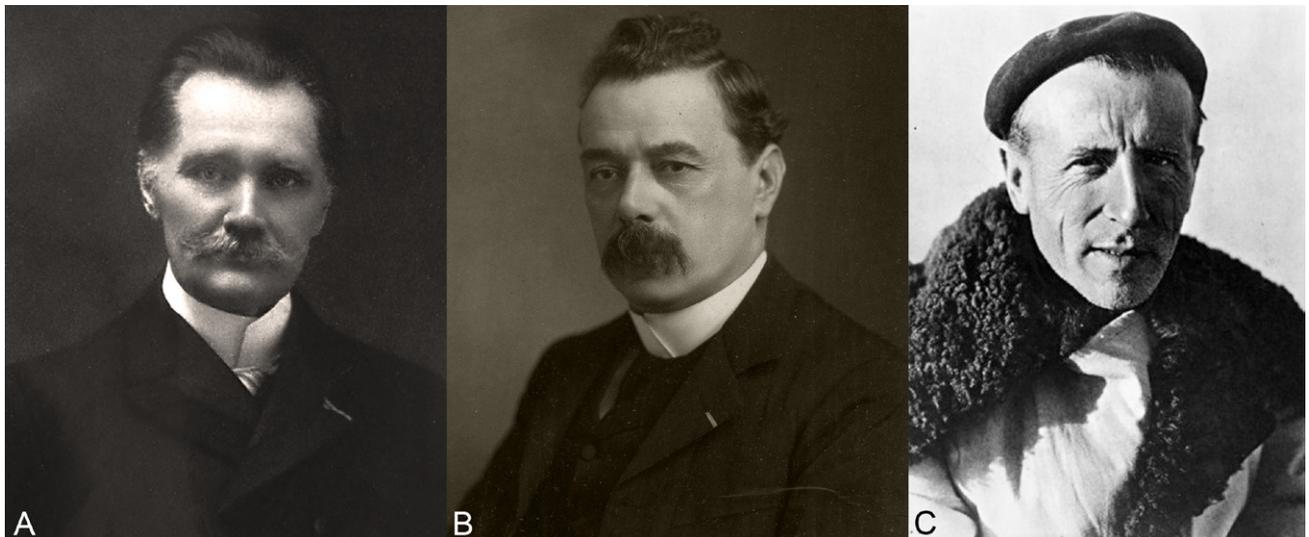


Figure 1. Portraits of Aimé-Louis Rutot (A), Louis Dollo (B), and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (C), who all worked on Early Paleogene continental deposits and vertebrates of Belgium. A-L. Rutot discovered several famous localities and studied the stratigraphy including those of Erquelinnes (1881), Dormaal (1883), and Leval (1901). L. Dollo studied some reptiles and invited P. Teilhard de Chardin in the study of mammals between 1921 and 1928.