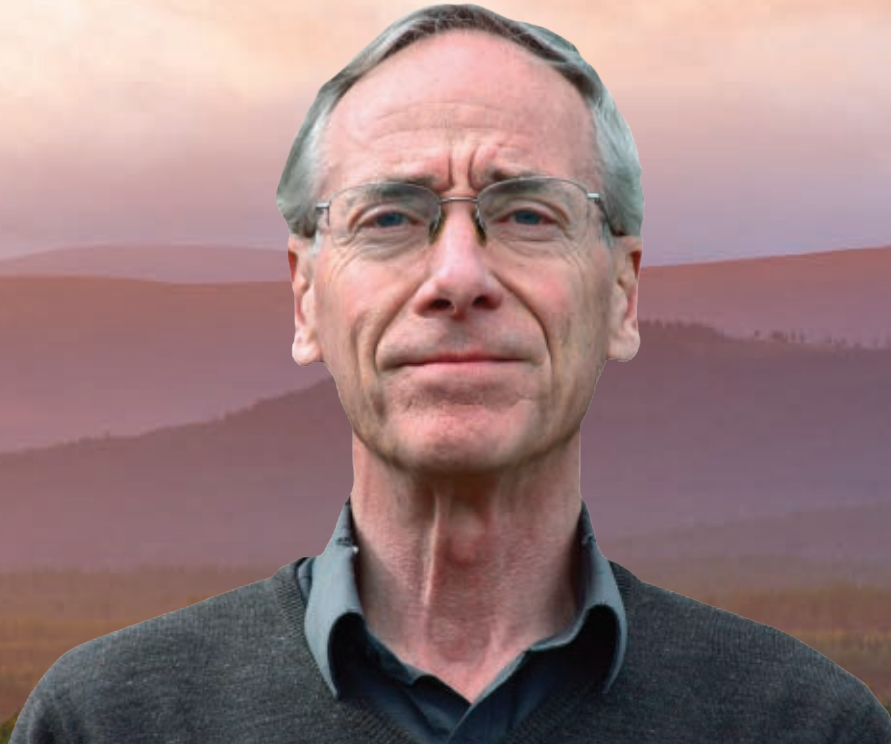


REFLECTIONS ON A LIFE IN BIOSCIENCE

Philip Bell chats with retired pharmaceutical and biomedical expert *Dr Marc Surtees*



Marc Surtees has a bachelor's degree in Applied Biology from Brunel University of London, and a Ph.D. in Zoology from the University of Reading. He retired in 2021, after more than 30 years of work in the pharmaceutical industry, mainly in medical research.

Throughout his working life, he has maintained an active interest in evidence-based biology—but also paleontology and geology—especially as these relate to the creation/evolution debate. He continues to speak and write upon a wide range of issues, occasionally also posting blogs on his website and short videos on YouTube.

Marc lives in Scotland with his wife Rosalind, sharing their lives with their younger son, daughter-in-law, and three young grandchildren.

MARC WAS born in Nigeria, two years before it gained independence in 1960. His father was there to research the mosquito responsible for spreading the Yellow Fever virus. When he was 18 months old, the family moved back to England where most of his upbringing took place.

Childhood convictions

Since his parents were Christians, the family all attended church. Marc distinctly remembers becoming convicted of his sins at the tender age of six, but says, “I spent several years wondering if I was a sheep

or a goat” (Matthew 25:31–46). Finally, aged 10, he gained assurance that he did indeed belong to the Lord Jesus Christ. He was later baptized at 16.

Marc is known for his strong creation convictions. Apparently, from early childhood, he never doubted that the Bible was true from Genesis 1:1 onwards:

So, when we were told during a school science lesson that the universe came out of a big bang 15 billion years ago, I realized there was a problem. I didn't know how to resolve the conflict, but I held firm to my belief in six-day recent creation.

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At sixteen, Marc was greatly helped by reading *The World That Perished* by creationist pioneer John Whitcomb (1924–2020).¹ This book wonderfully confirmed his belief that the entire universe had been created by God “only about 6,000 years ago.” From that point on, he says, “I was determined to follow a career in biology, convinced that it reveals the amazing design of life.”

Higher science education can be a difficult time for young people with biblical creation convictions. Marc says that secular education “continuously challenged my belief in God. But it never provided any foundation for non-belief in the Creator God revealed in the Bible.” The challenge did not deter him from pursuing his love of biological science:

I was always interested in living things, and that led to a lifelong interest in biology. As I studied biology, all the evidence pointed to the amazing design of living things. The evidence only offered support for life’s variation and adaptation rather than evolution of one kind into another.

Biology demands design

Dr Surtees thinks he gained his interest in biology and science in general from his scientist father, who didn’t, however, try to influence Marc in this direction. Whatever he looked at throughout his studies, the evidence of God’s purposeful design was staring Marc in the face: “I was always impressed at how the intricate structure of living things showed that they were extremely well designed.”

During this period, he continued reading material from various creation-believing scientists (especially connected with the UK’s Biblical Creation Society²). He began to write some articles of his own, too.

The challenges by those coming from a secular worldview were never far away. But their inability to give “a satisfactory

evolutionary explanation for the origin of life, and all the amazing variety of living things, actually reinforced my belief in biblical creation.” Marc thought it was obvious that the facts of biology confirmed the biblical creation worldview—the only coherent explanation of origins.

Marc’s Ph.D. research was in the field of reproductive endocrinology. Specifically, he looked at the hormonal control mechanisms that regulate seasonal breeding in grey squirrels (*Sciurus carolinensis*).³ He saw clear evidence of design in what he was examining:

These mechanisms are based around negative feedback that keeps the concentration of hormones at the correct levels. But there is also a secondary control regulating the sensitivity of the system. This is so that reproduction is switched on and off at the right time in response to day length.

Negative feedback is a design concept built into machines by engineers to regulate many things such as engine speed. Such features appear designed because they were designed. Some of the designed mechanisms were subsequently corrupted by random mutations since the Fall. But when we look at living things, we always see clear evidence of design.

Biology bespeaks beauty

Having studied and written about various creatures in detail, Marc unashamedly takes things further still:

Not only is there amazing variety in living things, each well designed, there is also so much beauty, which brings glory to the Creator. Evolutionists cannot give a good

“We are always looking for meaning and purpose, but evolution provides neither of these things.”

answer to the question, ‘Why is a flower so beautiful?’

Living things are so much more complex than they need to be, but that complexity results in robust systems for maintaining life. All this just shouts out that there must be a Creator of great power and wisdom, whose glory is reflected in His creation. The biblical creationary paradigm makes so much more sense of the universe. And it gives answers to: why there is something rather than nothing; why there is beauty; and also, why there is ugliness, disease, and death.

Exactly right! Clearly, Marc’s interest goes much further than the marvellous complexity of biological systems. As a Christian, he is also concerned at how evolutionism robs human beings (particularly young children) of so much more:

We are always looking for meaning and purpose, but evolution provides neither of these things. To paraphrase Richard Dawkins and many other atheistic evolutionists—if evolution is true then everything is meaningless.

Paradigm shift

With such convictions, Marc and Rosalind Surtees wanted to help change the way others look at the world. This is challenging; those entrenched in a wrong worldview need a profound change of mind about their assumptions, ideas, beliefs, and theories. So:

In 2000 we took a small step in getting the creation message out into the marketplace of ideas. We opened a small science and nature shop in Edinburgh. The shop was called ‘Paradigm Shift’ and the tagline was: ‘Changing the way we look at the world’. We sold microscopes and telescopes, which directly change the

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way we look at things and reveal the wonders of creation; also fossils, minerals, science kits, and similar.

What a great idea! I learned of this when I first briefly met Marc at a conference in 2000.⁴ Marc and Rosalind were resourceful:

With each purchase, we included a leaflet which presented the creationary paradigm. We also had a range of creation publications, videocassettes (and later DVDs). This led to many opportunities to present the truth of Scripture and point people to the Creator.

Unfortunately, the long-term sustainability of this enterprise proved difficult, and they had to sell up in 2013. But there is little doubt that numerous people were encouraged to ponder more deeply on the big questions of life. And some indeed had a paradigm shift in their thinking about origins.

Faith tested and fortified

I asked Marc how he had met challenges to his stand on Scripture, both generally, and particularly as a scientist. Marc started by highlighting the vital importance of daily prayer and Bible reading. From an early age, these were an important part of his life and remain so to the present.

The family would start the day with “family worship” and would have Scripture reading and prayer at the end of each day too. Marc says, “This very simple habit is, I believe, why we are still walking with Jesus.”

In 1985, he started work on drug development within the pharmaceutical industry, then moved into research involving clinical trials of drugs in development. However, before long, he ran into a big problem:

In 1986, I was asked to work on a project to develop abortion drugs. I had to tell my manager that I could

“I had to tell my manager that I could not work on something that would be used to kill babies.”

Edinburgh's Paradigm Shift bookshop (2000–2013) was designed to challenge, even transform, the worldview of its customers!



not work on something that would be used to kill babies.

To my surprise, instead of dismissal, I found that my manager's manager agreed with me. And some staff higher up in the company were also not in favour of developing this 'market'. As far as I know, the company never went on to develop and sell abortion drugs.

God honoured Marc's faithful stand for his biblically-informed principles. Later, in the 1990s, Marc's work meant a move to France. Again, faith was tested, as they joined a small church that was “struggling to be faithful in a culture which is founded on secular philosophy and specifically rejects biblical faith.” And in the multinational company he

worked for, Marc's French colleagues were not sure what to make of “a scientist who was not just a Christian but also a young earth creationist.”

Wider interests and research

Being an avid hiker with a keen interest in geology, Marc found Edinburgh a great place to live. He was within easy reach of sites that have become geological icons. As he says:

These sites played a major part in uniformitarian geology through the work of influencers like Hutton and Lyell. For example, Holyrood Park, an extinct volcano, is the location of Hutton's Section and Hutton's Rock. Siccar Point (a rock formation that was used as evidence for 'deep time') is only about one hour's drive away.⁵



Geological icon of deep time at Siccar Point, Scotland. The vertical dark grey rock ribs of sandstone (greywacke) are overlain by horizontal reddish sandstone layers. Hutton assumed erosion took eons of time, but overlooked the power of Noah's Flood.

Upon retirement, Marc and Rosalind moved to a rural area north of Dundee, close to the Cairngorms (mountains in Scotland's Eastern Highlands)—a region great for more hiking!

Marc continues to be active as a researcher and writer on topics relating to biblical creation and science. By keeping

abreast of biological and paleontological papers in peer-reviewed evolutionary literature, he gains insights that support what he calls 'the creationary paradigm'.

Sometimes, he even visits important locations connected with his research projects, such as a site in Croatia with abundant dinosaur tracks (photo below).

In 2023, Marc presented some of this work at the 9th International Conference on Creationism in Ohio, USA,⁶ and his research continues.

It is encouraging to meet someone like Marc Surtees, who has carved out a successful scientific career, while maintaining his integrity as a committed Christian and an informed biblical creationist. Aspiring young researchers should take note—whether pursuing a career in academia or industry. ■

References and notes

1. CMI staff, Vale Dr John C. Whitcomb (1924–2020): A tribute to the co-author of *The Genesis Flood*, creation.com/vale-whitcomb, 8 Feb 2020.
2. Now called Biblical Creation Trust.
3. Native to eastern North America where it's called the eastern gray squirrel, it has been introduced in many places around the world and is considered an invasive species in Europe.
4. The 7th European Creationist Congress, at the University of Portsmouth, England.
5. Walker, T., Unmasking a long-age icon, *Creation* 27(1):50–55, 2004; creation.com/hutton-siccar-point.
6. Hosted by Cedarville University, Cedarville, Ohio, 16–19 July 2023.

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Dr Surtees in Croatia examining beautifully-preserved footprints of a three-toed dinosaur for a research project