

**Randy Wayne**  
**Department of Plant Biology**  
**Cornell University**  
**Ithaca, New York 14853**

February 18, 2005

Nobelprize.org  
The Official Web Site of the Nobel Foundation  
Nobel Web AB  
P.O. Box 5232  
SE-102 45  
Stockholm, Sweden  
E-mail Office: [comments@nobel.se](mailto:comments@nobel.se)

Dear Nobelprize.org,

We would like to thank you for your interesting, informative and inspiring website. However, we suggest that there might be a slight ambiguity in Erwin Schrödinger's biography which may have led to misinformation in other websites.

The published biography of Erwin Schrödinger that appears on your website (<http://nobelprize.org/physics/laureates/1933/schrodinger-bio.html>), states in the first paragraph that "...he took up botany, which resulted in a series of papers on plant phylogeny." In this paragraph, it is unclear whether the "he" stands for Erwin Schrödinger or Rudolf Schrödinger.

We think that the "he" actually refers to his father, Rudolf Schrödinger. Rudolf Schrödinger, who held the post of vice president of The Zoological-Botanical Society of Vienna<sup>1,2</sup> indeed published two papers

---

<sup>1</sup> Moore, T. J. 1989. Schrödinger. Life and Thought. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. P. 116.

<sup>2</sup> Handlirsch, A. 1920. Allemeine Versammlung und Sitzung der Sektion für Zoologie. Verhandlungen zoologisch-botanischen Gesellschaft in Wien 70: 33-36.

on plant phylogeny in the Verhandlungen der zoologisch-botanischen Gesellschaft in Wien<sup>3,4</sup>.

Erwin Schrödinger's own words support the thesis that his father published works in botany. Erwin Schrödinger wrote about his father, "*He had an unusually broad culture; after his university studies as a chemist, there followed many years of intense concern for Italian painters, accompanied by his own landscape drawings and etchings, giving way finally to pyxides and microscope, from which arose a series of publications on plant phylogenetics*"<sup>5</sup>.

Perhaps the confusion comes from the fact that R. Schrödinger published a botanical paper in 1927, approximately 7 years after Rudolf Schrödinger's death, which occurred December 24, 1919. Thus one may wonder whether it was a publication of the dead father or the living son?

The answer can be found in the footnotes of the 1927 paper. After the father died Professor R. Wettstein sifted through Rudolf Schrödinger's unfinished botanical manuscripts and salvaged one paper, which is the one published in 1927, seven years after Rudolf Schrödinger's death.

While the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence, additional evidence to support the claim that Rudolf and not Erwin Schrödinger published papers in plant phylogeny comes from Armin Hermann's<sup>6</sup> biography of Erwin Schrödinger, William Scott's<sup>7</sup> book on Erwin Schrödinger and the Dictionary of Scientific Biography<sup>8</sup>, which states that Rudolf published a series of papers in Verhandlungen zoologisch-botanischen Gesellschaft in Wien and does not mention any botanical publications by Erwin Schrödinger. Moreover, a search through Naturae

---

<sup>3</sup> Schrödinger, R. 1919. Phylogenetische Ausichten über Scheiden- und Stipularbildungen. Verhandlungen zoologisch-botanischen Gesellschaft in Wien 69: 162-193.

<sup>4</sup> Schrödinger, R. 1927. Die Stipeln der Cunoniaceen. Verhandlungen zoologisch-botanischen Gesellschaft in Wien 77: 5-38.

<sup>5</sup> Moore, T. J. 1989. Schrödinger. Life and Thought. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. P. 17.

<sup>6</sup> Hermann, A. 1963. Erwin Schrödinger—Eine Biographie. In: Die Wellenmechanik, Dokumente der Naturwissenschaft. Volume 3, Ernst Battenberg, Stuttgart. p. 173.

<sup>7</sup> Scott, W. T. 1967. Erwin Schrödinger. An Introduction to his Writings. University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, MA. p 1.

<sup>8</sup> Hermann, A. 1975. Schrodinger, Erwin. Dictionary of Scientific Biography. 12: 217-223. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York.

Novitates<sup>9</sup>, an index of the German scientific literature, shows that all of Erwin Schrödinger's publications were in physics and none were in botany. Furthermore, bibliographies of Erwin Schrödinger put out by the Zentralbibliothek für Physik in Wien<sup>10</sup> and published in Dokumente der Naturwissenschaft Abteilung Physik<sup>11</sup> do not list any botanical papers, and lastly, after Rudolf Schrödinger's death, Erwin Schrödinger<sup>12</sup> "...sold off all his beautiful instruments, and disposed of his books, especially the botanical ones."

The evidence against the statement that Erwin Schrödinger "...took up botany, which resulted in a series of papers on plant phylogeny", is weighty. Indeed, except for the birth date, we suggest that the entire first paragraph refers to Rudolf Schrödinger. If you should agree with our assessment, perhaps you would add this information to your website, since your website is extensively quoted on the web. We would also be happy to send you copies of Rudolf Schrödinger's papers.

Sincerely,

Randy Wayne  
Associate Professor of Plant Biology  
Cornell University  
Ithaca, New York 14853 USA

Georg Hoffstaetter  
Associate Professor of Physics  
Laboratory of Elementary  
Particle Physics (LEPP)  
Cornell University  
Ithaca, New York 14853 USA

---

<sup>9</sup> Call Number Z 7403 N28

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.zbp.univie.ac.at/schrodinger/uebersicht.htm>

<sup>11</sup> Koch, E.-E.. 1963. Bibliographie Erwin Schrödinger. In: Die Wellenmechanik, Dokumente der Naturwissenschaft. Volume 3, Ernst Battenberg, Stuttgart. pp. 193-199.

<sup>12</sup> Moore, T. J. 1989. Schrödinger. Life and Thought. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. P. 117.

