Genealogy, History, and Mystery: On the Origin of Animals

Sunday, March 13, 2016 | 1 pm

Claudia Cassidy Theater
Chicago Cultural Center
78 E. Washington

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Biologists (and others) have speculated on the origin and antecedents of animals for hundreds of years but, until recently, real data have been rare and the arguments offered have been less than compelling. The last two decades have seen a revolution in the analytical methodology (especially the approach known as “cladistics”) and in the sheer volume of data (mostly at the molecular level) relevant to this question. It is now possible to offer a well-supported (and testable) hypothesis of the ancestors and nearest living relatives of the Metazoa (animals) and a broad outline of the pattern of metazoan diversification from the first multicellular forms to sperm whales, giant squid, and mosquitos. This presentation will offer a glimpse into this rapidly-advancing branch of biology and, perhaps, change your ideas of our place in the Earth’s biosphere.

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