

## ORIGINS AND THE “CREATED KIND” CONCEPT

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Today, most creationists take the view that variation and speciation can occur only within created kinds. These kinds appeared for the first time in the creation week, and since then have colonized the Earth. For land-dwelling animals, modern representatives would have to be the descendants of the kinds carried on the ark (Genesis 6:17; 8:17-19).

However, there is no real consensus on the biological definition of the word “kind,” or the criteria for grouping animals within a kind. Some creationists equate the term with a particular taxonomic level higher than species (such as genus or family). Most, however, avoid such comparisons altogether. Byron Nelson wrote:

The “kinds” of Genesis refer not to the “systematic” species identified by men, but to those natural species of which the world is full, which have power to vary within themselves in such a way that the members of the species are not all exactly alike, but which, nevertheless, cannot go out of the bounds that the Creator set (1967, p. 4).

In 1941, Frank Marsh coined the term “baramin”—a compound of the Hebrew words *bara* (“created”) and *min* (“kind”). He suggested that the nearest equivalent to the created kind would vary, depending on the greatest taxonomic level at which two organisms could interbreed (1976, p. 34). For example, while there are several species of cattle and bison, they likely belong to the same kind because they all can interbreed (Marsh, 1976, p. 31). The differences of opinion, and the apparent flexibility in the idea, have given anti-creationists cause for criticism. Joel Cracraft complained:

The “created kind” is the unit of creation event just as the species is the unit of evolutionary change. Consequently, if the concept of “created kind” cannot be defined so that it can be used to interpret and investigate nature, then it is of little or no importance for the growth of knowledge (1983, p. 169).

However, the same sort of criticisms leveled at kinds can be turned on the species concept, which is neither well defined nor objective. First, the widely held **biological** species concept “holds that a species is a population of organisms that can at least potentially breed with one another but that do not breed with other populations” (Rennie, 1991). Unfortunately, two populations may not breed because they are isolated geographically. This may lead to taxonomic splitting, by which taxonomists give two different names to populations that could interbreed if given the chance. Practically speaking, very few species undergo extensive cross-breeding experiments before classification to test their reproductive isolation. Hybridization is another problem. Two seemingly distinct plant species may cross to produce fertile hybrids.

The potential for taxonomic splitting is especially acute in the fossil record, where it is impossible to apply the biological species concept. Instead, paleontologists tend to define species on their morphology alone. However, the soft parts of an organism rarely are preserved, and the identification must rest almost entirely on hard parts (e.g., bones, teeth, etc.). Any evolutionary relationships drawn from such studies are necessarily limited (Major, 1991).

Second, the species idea often takes on a definite evolutionary connotation. As I noted earlier, Cracraft claims that the species is “the unit of evolutionary change” (1983, p. 169). He wants to replace the biological species concept with his own **phylogenetic** species concept, mainly because he is not satisfied with any definition that ignores alleged evolutionary relationships. Cracraft’s concept defines a species as “the smallest recognizable cluster of individuals that share a common pattern of ancestry” (Rennie, 1991).

The created kind concept can hold its own against these definitions. It proposes that a kind will consist of populations that can interbreed, while still allowing room for variation. If implemented systematically, the concept would reveal barriers or discontinuities between created kinds. “In order to make this evidence of creation available,” Kurt Wise has suggested, “there is a serious need for creation biologists to create, adopt, and employ a reproducible method of flagging identifiable phyletic discontinuities” (1990, 2:354). Creationists, like Wise, are continuing their work on kinds. In the meantime we face a taxonomic system encumbered with evolutionary presuppositions.

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