

MONREPOS

Archaeological Research Centre and Museum
for Human Behavioural Evolution



LEIBNIZ - ZENTRUM
FÜR ARCHÄOLOGIE

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HUMAN ROOTS AWARD 2025

MONREPOS Archaeological Research Centre honours archaeologist John D. Speth with international research award

Neuwied / Mainz. The HUMAN ROOTS AWARD is being presented for the sixth time this year by the MONREPOS Archaeological Research Centre and Museum of Human Behavioural Evolution, an institution of the Leibniz-Zentrum für Archäologie (LEIZA) based in Mainz, Germany. This year's award goes to American anthropologist and professor John D. Speth, one of the most influential scholars in the field of early human history. The MONREPOS jury particularly commends his research-based perspective on historical sources and his pioneering studies on Palaeolithic diets. The HUMAN ROOTS AWARD is endowed with 10,000 Euros and honours scientists who have made significant contributions to the understanding of human behavioural evolution.

John D. Speth is one of the world's leading experts on the lifeways and diets of Paleolithic hunter-gatherers. He is Professor Emeritus of Anthropology and served as Curator at the Museum of Anthropology at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, USA, where he was responsible for the North American archaeology collections. His areas of expertise include zooarchaeology, Pleistocene and early Holocene archaeology (i.e. the archaeology of the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic), Southwestern American archaeology, and ethnohistory — the study that connects written and oral traditions with archaeological findings.

Over a career spanning more than five decades, Speth has made fundamental contributions to our understanding of how our ancestors obtained, processed and shared food. His extensive fieldwork in the southwestern United States and the Middle East has transformed debates on meat consumption, big-game hunting and the social and symbolic behaviours of early humans. Speth challenged long-held assumptions, such as the idea that protein was the most vital nutrient. Instead, he demonstrated that fat and social relationships played a decisive role in survival.

His interdisciplinary approach, integrating archaeological data with insights from physiology and ethnography, has earned him a distinguished place within the fields of anthropology and archaeology. John D. Speth is also one of the last active representatives of the influential generation

associated with the so-called “New Archaeology” – a movement that, since the 1960s, has introduced innovative methods and theories into archaeological research.

The HUMAN ROOTS AWARD – a prize for interdisciplinary research

The HUMAN ROOTS AWARD has been presented by the MONREPOS Archaeological Research Centre since 2017 and is now regarded as the "little Nobel Prize" of archaeology and human behavioural evolution. The aim of the award is to promote interdisciplinary scientific dialogue and raise public awareness of the relevance of findings from research into the evolution of humankind for the future of humanity.

"With the HUMAN ROOTS AWARD, we aim to build a bridge between the archaeology of human origins and other sciences," explains Professor Dr Sabine Gaudzinski-Windheuser, Head of MONREPOS and member of the award jury. "By linking the archaeological perspective on 'becoming human' with the humanistic agenda of 'being human,' we can sustainably shape 'remaining human' for our future."

Following the death of Irenäus Eibl-Eibesfeldt, one of the founding fathers of human ethology and patron of the first HUMAN ROOTS AWARD, the renowned evolutionary biologist and first prizewinner Richard Dawkins assumed the role of patron in 2018. Previous recipients include Steven Pinker and Robin Dunbar. In 2022, developmental psychologist Michael Tomasello was honoured. In 2024, Paola Villa is the first female archaeologist to receive this award.

Contact

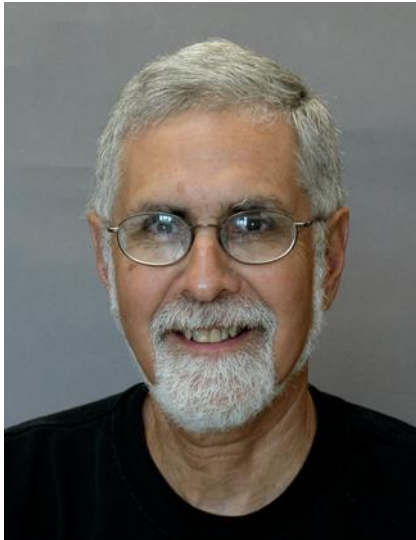
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Press Photo



Archaeologist John D. Speth is the sixth recipient of the Human Roots Award. This award recognises outstanding research achievements that contribute to our understanding of human behavioural evolution.

Credits: University of Michigan

MONREPOS Archaeological Research Centre and Museum for Human Behavioural Evolution

MONREPOS is at the same time museum and research institute. It is a department of the Leibniz-Zentrum für Archäologie, based in Mainz, a Leibniz-Association research institute, located in the Monrepos stately home near Neuwied, where research has been conducted for more than 35 years. The research centre and museum is closely linked to the Pre- and Protohistoric Archaeology section at the Institute of Ancient Studies of the Johannes Gutenberg-University Mainz.

Our research focuses on the inheritance we carry within us, which is worth millions: Our human behaviour has evolved over more than 2.6 million years. This early human history spans the longest and defining period of our behavioural evolution that is central to our research at MONREPOS. Our archaeology thrives on working together, on questions, impulses, discussion. And, not least, on criticism and on tolerance. It needs people who are curious, creative and courageous whether these are scientists, pro bono helpers, media or visitors. MONREPOS sees itself as a platform for everyone who wishes to understand how we evolved and what unites us.

Leibniz-Zentrum für Archäologie | Leibniz Research Institute and Museum for Archaeology

As a Leibniz Research Institute and Museum for Archaeology, LEIZA studies humans and their development based on material remains that span three million years across time and space. The fundamental insights we gain improve our understanding of human behaviour, actions and the development of societies. In this way, LEIZA enriches our knowledge of humans from an archaeological perspective and creates essential foundations for reflecting on the present and shaping the future. With archaeology, LEIZA views human beings in context and shares the knowledge gained in international dialogue. LEIZA is active worldwide and has successfully and comprehensively conducted research in various regions of Africa, Asia and Europe. The unique concentration of archaeological, scientific, restoration and information technology expertise, combined with important workshops, laboratories and archives, makes it possible to conduct object-oriented research into the archaeology of the ancient world (Asia, Africa, Europe) from the beginnings of human history to modern times. As one of eight research museums in the Leibniz Association, LEIZA combines excellent science with exhibitions and, with its educational mission, is also a place for dialogue with the public.

Until its renaming on 1 January 2023, LEIZA was known internationally as the Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum (RGZM), which was founded in Mainz in 1852 by resolution of the German Historical and Antiquities Societies. Since 2024, LEIZA is represented at four locations in Germany: Mainz, Neuwied, Mayen, and Schleswig. www.leiza.de

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