



On the Origin of Species

Charles Darwin (1809 - 1882)

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The Origin of Species (1859) by Charles Darwin laid the foundation for the science of evolutionary biology that revolutionized our understanding of nature and mankind's place within it. Published in 1859, the original title was *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* and was abbreviated for the sixth edition in 1872. The central premise is that the diversity of life results from a branching pattern of evolution from a common source and that populations change over the generations to adapt to changing circumstances through natural selection. Various notions of "transmutation" had been proposed prior to publication and were considered controversial, as they stood in opposition to the long held belief that the diversity of life was the product of an unchanging design

and that humans were distinct from all other species. Darwin was an established scientist, and the work, which was written for the general reader, included exhaustive documentation from decades of research and analyzed the theory from philosophical and religious perspectives as well as scientific. As such, it was taken seriously, gained widespread interest, and helped the campaign to secularize science. During the late nineteenth century the notion of evolution became generally accepted, but it wasn't until the mid twentieth century that the significance of natural selection was fully understood as biologists and statisticians combined Darwin's work with Mendel's genetic theories to arrive at the modern evolutionary synthesis. This central notion is now the unifying concept of the life sciences.

Charles Darwin (February 12, 1809 – April 19, 1882) was an English scientist best known for the theory of evolution, showing that all species descend from common ancestors through a branching pattern in a process that he termed natural selection. The concept of Darwinism holds that the struggle for existence gives rise to the development and advancement of traits favorable to survival of the species.

Darwin was born to a wealthy society doctor and his wife, the daughter of Josiah Wedgwood, founder of the famous pottery company. Sent to University of Edinburgh medical school, he neglected his studies in favor of taxidermy and natural history. He earned a degree at Cambridge and met leading naturalists who regarded their scientific work as natural theology. Upon graduation he joined the voyage of the HMS Beagle to chart the coastline of South America. During the five year voyage he collected specimens and investigated geology, taking copious notes and sending specimens back to England. He had become a celebrity in the scientific community upon his return in 1836. He immersed himself in the life of a gentleman scientist, married his cousin Emma and settled in London.

He was deeply influenced by *An Essay on the Principle of Population* by Thomas Malthus and saw a connection with the selective breeding practiced by farmers, which led to the formulation of his theory and the publication of *On the Origin of Species* in 1859. He was a prolific writer and continued publishing, notably *The Descent of Man, Selection in Relation to Sex* and *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals*, until his death in 1882.