

Press information

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Darwin facts

- During the five-year *Beagle* expedition, Darwin shipped home 1,529 species preserved in spirit and 3,907 labelled skins, bones and other dried specimens.
- Charles Darwin beat Charles Dickens to become the face of the new £10 note in 2000. Although his beard makes it hard to reproduce his portrait hair-by-hair.
- Darwin was voted in the top five greatest Britons by BBC viewers in 2002.
- Charles Darwin is the most frequently featured person on stamps outside the Royal Family.
- Darwin in north Australia was named by two of Darwin's former shipmates, who led the *Beagle's* next voyage. It is now a thriving city and has its own Darwin200 celebrations planned.
- The first ape Darwin saw was an orang-utan named Jenny at London Zoo in 1838. He was immediately struck by the similarities between her behaviour and that of humans.
- Before Darwin's ideas were published, most people believed species were unchanging. Concern about extinction was unheard of.
- British naturalist, Alfred Russel Wallace, independently conceived a theory of natural selection identical to Darwin's, but based on completely different observations, on the other side of the world. Darwin and Wallace's theories were both presented on the same day in 1858 to the Linnean Society of London.
- Survival of the fittest was not a phrase coined by Darwin. He borrowed it from the economist Herbert Spencer, on Wallace's advice. It does not appear in *On the Origin of Species* until the fifth edition.
- Despite being best known for his contribution to biology, Darwin's first scientific paper was on geology.
- The concept of evolution existed before Darwin. However, he was the first person to explain it through natural selection.
- Darwin was a Christian when he wrote *On the Origin of Species* and was probably agnostic when he died.
- Less than half (48 per cent) of the UK population accepts evolution as the best description for the development of life, according to a 2006 Ipsos Mori poll.
- 53 per cent of the US population accepts evolution as the best description for the development of life, according to a 2007 Gallup Poll.



- More than 40 per cent of the UK population believes that creationism or intelligent design should be taught in school science lessons, according to a 2006 Ipsos Mori poll.
- Darwin's famous book on evolution, *On the Origin of Species*, was aimed at the general public. Darwin wanted his theory to be as widely accessible as possible.

Childhood

- Charles and his older brother, Erasmus, were renowned for the chemistry experiments they conducted in an outbuilding at the family home in Shrewsbury.
- When he was a child, Darwin's father said 'You care for nothing but shooting, dogs and rat-catching, and you will be a disgrace to yourself and all your family'.
- In 1825, aged 16, Darwin enrolled at Edinburgh University, following his father and grandfather to study medicine. He dropped out after two years.
- As a student at Cambridge, Darwin presided over the Glutton Club, which met weekly to seek out and eat unusual meats.

The *Beagle* voyage

- In 1833, Darwin inadvertently ate a new bird species for Christmas dinner on the *Beagle*. When he realised, the leftovers were immediately preserved and sent home. They were later named after Darwin as the lesser rhea – *Rhea darwini*.
- Darwin collected fossils of extinct giant mammals, such as the giant ground sloth and the armoured *Glyptodon*, as well as living animals and plants.
- When Darwin explored the Galapagos Islands in 1835, it was the similarities and differences between mockingbirds – not the famous finches – on different islands that made him wonder how they were related.
- The first record of Darwin's idea that all living things are related and have a common ancestor came six months after the *Beagle* voyage. He sketched a diagram of an evolutionary tree, its branching lines resembling the structure of an alga specimen, called *Amphiroa orbignyana*, that he collected in Argentina.

Darwin the scientist

- Unlike most scientists, Darwin didn't have a laboratory. He used the grounds around his home at Down House in Kent to devise experiments to test his theories.
- Darwin believed that he could learn things from nearly anyone and exchanged ideas with many different experts, from Cambridge professors to pig breeders. Many correspondents were not considered valid sources of scientific information by Darwin's peers– yet domesticated animals turned out to be a key piece of evidence in his work.
- He forged his reputation as a biologist in a paper about the entire group of living and fossil barnacles – the product of eight years' study – after he was inspired by specimens he collected off the coast of Chile.
- Darwin designed a wormograph to measure the effects of worms on the level of soil in his garden at Down House. He also kept worms in pots of earth in his study to observe their reaction to different sounds, including the bassoon and French horn.

- Darwin conducted simple experiments on plants at Down House. He soaked seeds in salt water to find out if they could still germinate after drifting across oceans, grew seedlings through pegs to measure the strength of their shoots and scrutinised climbing plants to understand how they moved.
- Darwin cultivated 54 varieties of gooseberry and many varieties of peas, cabbages and beans for his research on the diversity of species.
- When he needed evidence for his theory of evolution by natural selection, he studied domestic pigeons. In 1885, he built a pigeon house in his garden. Darwin showed a variety of extreme characteristics could be produced over many generations, by selective breeding.
- Darwin grew a comet orchid from Madagascar in his greenhouse and predicted a moth with a 30 centimetre proboscis would be needed to pollinate it. The moth was discovered 30 years after he died.
- Darwin was a prolific letter writer. In his lifetime, he sent around 14,500, including many to respected scientists Joseph Hooker, Charles Lyell and Asa Gray.