

## Press information

November 2008

### **'I am like a gambler, and love a wild experiment.'** **A selection of Darwin quotes**

#### **On the complexity of life**

'It is interesting to contemplate an entangled bank, clothed with many plants of many kinds, with birds singing on the bushes, with various insects flitting about, and with worms crawling through the damp earth, and to reflect that these elaborately constructed forms, so different from each other, and dependent on each other in so complex a manner, have all been produced by laws acting around us.'

*On the Origin of Species*, 1859

'There is grandeur in this view of life ... that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved.'

*On the Origin of Species*, 1859

'I can see no very great difficulty [...] in believing that natural selection has converted the simple apparatus of an optic nerve merely coated with pigment and invested by transparent membrane, into an optical instrument as perfect as is possessed by any member of the great Articulate class.'

*On the Origin of Species*, 1859

'It is curious that I remember well time when the thought of the eye made me cold all over, but I have got over this stage of the complaint, and now small trifling particulars of structure often make me very uncomfortable. The sight of the peacock's tail, whenever I gaze it, makes me sick!'

Correspondence 8, 140pp

#### **On evolution by natural selection**

'I have just finished my sketch of my species theory. If, as I believe ... my theory is true, and if it be accepted even by one competent judge, it will be a considerable step in science.'

Note to his wife, Emma, 1844

'I can remember the very spot in the road, whilst in my carriage, when to my joy the solution occurred to me; and this was long after I had come to Down. The solution, as I believe, is that the modified offspring of all dominant and increasing forms tend to become adapted to many and highly diversified places in the economy of nature.'

Autobiography, 1887

'Can the principle of selection, which we have seen is so potent in the hands of man, apply in nature? I think we shall see that it can act most effectually.'

*On the Origin of Species*, 1859

#### **On humans and animals**

'Man in his arrogance thinks himself a great work worthy the interposition of a deity. More humble and I believe truer to consider him created from animals.'



Darwin's notebooks, 1838

### **On being a scientist**

'No poet ever felt more delighted at seeing his first poem published than I did at seeing, in Stephens' *Illustrations of British Insects*, the magic words, "captured by C Darwin, Esq."  
*The life and letters of Charles Darwin*, 1887, Volume 1E

### **On pigeons**

'I love them to that extent that I cannot bear to kill and skeletonise them.'  
A letter about his domestic pigeons to Joseph Dalton Hooker

### **About his voyage on HMS *Beagle***

'The voyage of the *Beagle* has been by far the most important event in my life, and has determined my whole career. Everything about which I thought or read was made to bear directly on what I had seen or was likely to see; and this habit of mind was continued during the five years of the voyage. I feel sure that it was this training which has enabled me to do whatever I have done in science.'

*The life and letters of Charles Darwin*, 1887

'*The Zoology of Archipelagoes* will be well worth examining; for such facts would undermine the stability of species.'  
Darwin's notebook, 1835

'It creates a feeling of wonder that so much beauty should be apparently created for such little purpose.'  
*Charles Darwin Beagle Diary*, edited by Randal Keynes p23

'I returned to the shore, treading on volcanic rocks, hearing the notes of unknown birds, and seeing new insects fluttering about still newer flowers. It has been for me a glorious day, like giving to a blind man eyes.'  
*Beagle voyage quote from Annie's Box* by Randal Keynes p23

'The delight of experiences in such times bewilders the mind. If the eye attempts to follow the flight of a gaudy butterfly, it is arrested by some strange tree or fruit; if watching an insect, one forgets it in the strange flower it is crawling over [...] The mind is a chaos of delight.'  
*Beagle voyage quote from Annie's Box* by Randal Keynes p23

### **On orchids**

'Kent appears to be the most favourable county in England for the order [of orchids], and within a mile of my house nine genera, including 13 species, grow.'

*Various Contrivances by which Orchids are Fertilized by Insects*, 1877 p279.

'In no other plant, or indeed in hardly any animal, can adaptations of one part to another, and of the whole to other organised beings widely remote in the scale of nature, be named more perfect than those presented by this orchid (*Orchis pyramidalis*).'

*Various Contrivances by which Orchids are Fertilised by Insects*, 1862 p. 28.

Title quote taken from a letter to Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, *More letters of Charles Darwin* p525