

Press information

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Timeline of Charles Darwin's life

- 1809** Charles Robert Darwin is born on 12 February at The Mount in Shrewsbury, Shropshire.
- 1817** Darwin's mother Susannah (née Wedgwood) dies when he is eight years old.
- 1825–1827** Darwin's father removes him from Shrewsbury Grammar School due to his poor progress and sends him to Edinburgh University. He later chastised his son, saying 'You care for nothing but shooting, dogs and rat-catching and you will be a disgrace to yourself and all your family'.
- 1827–1831** Darwin enrolls at Christ's College, Cambridge University to study theology in preparation for life as a country parson. He is introduced to beetle collecting and becomes known as 'the man who walks with Henslow' through spending a lot of time with the professor of botany.
- 1831–1836** Darwin makes major natural history collections as he travels around South America as the ship's naturalist aboard the HMS *Beagle*.
- 1835–1836** Darwin first considers the evolution of species while thinking about the variations among Galapagos mockingbirds, writing in his notebook 'If there is the slightest foundation for these remarks the zoology of Archipelagoes will be well worth examining, for such facts (would) undermine the stability of Species'.
- 1837** Darwin draws a simple evolutionary tree in one of his notebooks below the words 'I think'.
- 1838–1839** Darwin starts to develop his theory of natural selection.
- 1839** Darwin marries his cousin, Emma Wedgwood. They move to London and have two children. Darwin starts a natural history of babies, making detailed observations recording the development of expressions of emotion from birth. Eventually they have 10 children, although only seven survive to adulthood.
Publishes *The Journal of a Naturalist*.
- 1840** Publishes *Zoology of the Voyage of the Beagle*.
- 1842** Darwin wrote his first essay outlining his evolutionary theory.
Darwin moves to Down House in Bromley, Kent, where he lives for the rest of his life.
Publishes *The Structure and Distribution of Coral Reef*.
- 1844** Darwin secretly writes a landmark essay on evolution by natural selection and instructs his wife have it published in the event of his death, writing in a note to her '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'.

Darwin writes to botanist Joseph Hooker telling him of his evolutionary ideas, saying it is 'like confessing a murder'.

- 1851** Darwin's first daughter, Annie Elizabeth, dies at the age of ten, probably from tuberculosis. He recorded the last days of her illness and wrote a memorial to her, which was kept with other mementos of her life, in her writing box.
- 1854–59** Continues to develop the theory of evolution through reading, consulting other naturalists, observation and experimentation in his garden and the countryside around Down House.
- 1855** Carries out the first focused survey of biodiversity in a field at Down House and establishes the principle of divergence.
- 1856** Starts work on the first long version of *On the Origin of Species*.
- 1858** Darwin receives a letter from Alfred Russel Wallace in Indonesia, a young naturalist who has independently arrived at a theory of natural selection that is nearly identical to Darwin's.
- 1858** Both Darwin's and Wallace's theories are presented to the Linnaean Society on 1 July. They are officially published by the society in August. Darwin was unable to present his paper – the funeral for his youngest son took place on the same day as the meeting.
- 1859** Charles Darwin publishes *On the Origin of Species* on 24 November, putting forward his theory of evolution by natural selection.
- 1860** Based on his belief in special creation, Bishop Samuel Wilberforce leads an attack on Darwin's theory at a meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science (today known as the BA), held at Oxford University Museum. Two of England's most influential scientists, Thomas Huxley and Joseph Hooker, fiercely support Darwin's work. Both sides claim victory.
- 1862** Publishes *Fertilisation of Orchids*, based on his observations of wild orchids growing in the countryside around Down House.
- 1868** Publishes *Variation of Animals and Plants Under Domestication*, which provides detailed evidence for many of the statements made in *On the Origin of Species*.
- 1871** Darwin's *The Descent of Man* is published, explicitly applying his theories of evolution to humans.
- 1872** Publishes *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals*.
- 1876** Publishes *The effects of cross and self fertilisation in the vegetable kingdom* based on his work around Down House.
- 1881** Publishes *The Action of Worms*, noting their gradual but significant effects on soil movement.
- 1882** Charles Darwin dies. His friend, neighbour and scientist John Lubbock MP secures his burial in Westminster Abbey. Darwin's funeral is attended by England's leading politicians, scientists, and clergy.