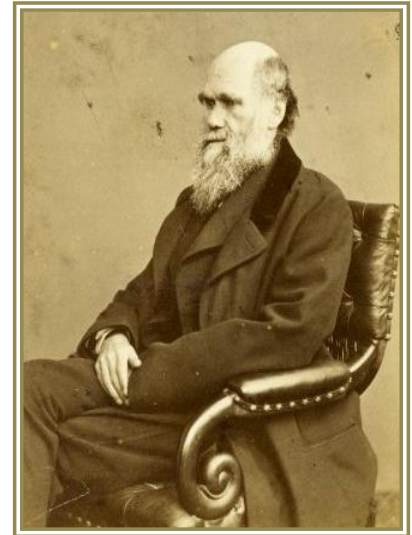


# A biography of Charles Darwin

(1809-1882)

Born in Shrewsbury in 1809, British scientist Charles Darwin became one of the most famous naturalists in the world. His ideas changed the way people think about nature and the living things that thrive in every environment on the planet Earth. Most notably, Darwin shocked many people with his ideas that human beings are directly descended from animals such as apes.

1859 was a time when people's thinking about the world was based on the story of Genesis in the Old Testament of the Bible, a Christian point of view, which describes how god created the world in seven days. Darwin's research and the document he wrote, called 'On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection', shocked everyone. The idea that humans were simply animals that had evolved, like all those animals around them, was hard for people to believe. Not least the Church which attacked Darwin's ideas, which went against its beliefs and teachings.



*Image credit Wellcome*

So how did Charles Darwin come to such a radical idea? During a scientific expedition to The Galapagos Islands in 1831, Darwin first began to think and read about fossils being possible evidence for ancient life on Earth. The Galapagos Islands are located about 500 miles west of the coast of South America. Here the animals had been isolated from the mainland and so had developed (evolved or adapted) their own unique characteristics. Once there, Darwin was enthralled by the vast array of distinct life forms around him. Many of the animals and plants here were unique.

Gradually, through observing species here and elsewhere, Darwin concluded that animals change to suit their environment over periods of time and that these changes take place over vast amounts of time. He came up with a theory of **natural selection** - where a species only survives if it conforms to the changes in nature around it. These changes might be in the food chains or in the environment. Darwin pondered on his ideas for 20 years before making a joint announcement with fellow scientist, Alfred Russel Wallace (who had similar notions).

Now, over 150 years later, Darwin and Wallace's theories are the accepted explanation of how life around us, including ourselves, has evolved to fit in with nature's ever-changing ways. Darwin, because of his careful evidence-based work, is regarded as one of the most respected scientific thinkers of the past few hundred years.

**LO: Comprehension - Charles Darwin**

Retrieval

- 1) When did Darwin travel to the Galapagos Islands?  
1859    1809    1831
- 2) What first led Darwin to come up with his ideas about evolution?
- 3) What was the key idea that most offended people about Darwin's thinking?

Vocabulary

- 4) What does 'vast array' mean?  
Wide range and amount / small numbers / different colours
- 5) Find a word which means 'only one of its kind'

Inference

- 6) Why didn't people accept Darwin's ideas when he first proposed them?
- 7) Why do you think Darwin waited twenty years before publishing his ideas?

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