



Australian Government  
Department of the Environment,  
Water, Heritage and the Arts



1809

12 February Charles Darwin born Shropshire England

## 200th Birthday

1831–1836

The voyage of the  
*HMS Beagle*



## 150th Anniversary

1859

*On the Origin of Species*  
is published

# Charles Darwin

## A VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY





# Charles Darwin timeline

## Childhood and college

- 1809 February 12 - Charles Robert Darwin is born in Shrewsbury, Shropshire, England.
- 1817 Charles begins school.
- 1822 Charles and his brother Erasmus set up a chemistry lab in the garden tool shed.
- 1825 Charles is taken out of school due to his poor grades and 'caring for nothing other than shooting birds, playing with dogs and catching rats'. He begins studying medicine at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland, learns the skills of taxidermy and hears about the tropical rainforests of South America from freed slave John Edmondstone.
- 1825 Charles quits medical school and begins studying for the clergy at Christ's College, Cambridge.
- 1828 Charles meets Reverend John Stevens Henslow, Professor of Botany at Cambridge, starts attending his lectures and becomes addicted to natural history.
- 1830 Charles decides to become a country clergyman/naturalist like Henslow. He spends his holidays collecting beetles and fly fishing.

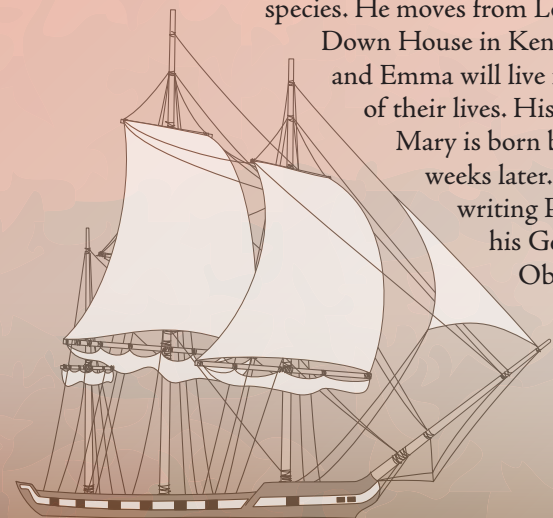
## The Beagle voyage

- 1831 Charles passes his final exams with good results and becomes the naturalist aboard H.M.S. *Beagle*.
- 1832 Charles explores the Eastern side of South America and sends off the first two of many shipments of specimens to Henslow in Cambridge.
- 1833 Charles' fossil observations at the Falkland Islands lead him to decide to 'compare' all fossil, plant and animal specimens he collects throughout the voyage.

- 1835 Charles' experience of a massive earthquake and rising areas of land at Valdivia, Chile, provides him with direct evidence supporting Charles Lyell's theory that land masses rise very slowly over very long time spans. Charles, his offsider Samuel Covington and the *Beagle* captain, Robert FitzRoy, collect specimens from the Galapagos Islands that will be crucial to the formulation of his theory of evolution by natural selection.
- 1836 Charles visits New South Wales, Tasmania and Western Australia and is so fascinated by some of the animals he sees (e.g. the platypus), that he remarks there must have been a separate creator just for these odd creatures. The *Beagle* finally returns to England.

## Post Beagle and marriage

- 1837 Charles learns that the specimens of 'finches', 'blackbirds', 'wrens' and 'gross beaks' collected at the Galapagos are actually all species of finches. He begins to develop theories for how new species come into existence.
- 1838 Charles develops the idea that natural selection is not influenced by divine intervention but, due to a concern for his reputation and the feelings of his future wife, Emma Wedgewood, decides to keep this to himself.
- 1839 Charles marries Emma Wedgewood. Later this year, their first child, William, is born. Charles begins barraging farmers and animal breeders with questions about species variation and inheritance. His story of the *Beagle* voyage is published and sells well.
- 1840 Charles is plagued by illness that began during the *Beagle* voyage and that is to plague him all his life.
- 1841 Charles' and Emma's daughter Anne is born.
- 1842 Part one of Charles' book *The Structure and Distribution of Coral Reefs* is published. He writes a rough draft of his theory of the origin of species. He moves from London to Down House in Kent, where he and Emma will live for the rest of their lives. His daughter Mary is born but dies a few weeks later. He begins writing Part two of his Geological Observations series *Volcanic Islands*.



## Early research

- 1843 Charles' and Emma's daughter Henrietta is born and his five volume book of the *Zoology of the Beagle Voyage* is completed.
- 1844 Charles confides his theories of evolution to the botanist Joseph Hooker and writes to his wife that, in the event of his death, she put aside four hundred pounds for the publication of this theory.
- 1845 Charles and Emma have another son, George. Hooker becomes a regular visitor to Down House where he discusses the geographical distribution of plants.
- 1846 Charles completes his book *Geological Observations on South America* and begins his eight-year barnacle research project to establish himself as an expert on species variation.
- 1847 Charles' health is now continuously poor. He gets feedback from Hooker on his book *On the Origin of Species*. Another daughter, Elizabeth, is born.
- 1848 Charles and Emma have another son, Francis.
- 1849 Darwin continues his research on barnacle specimens he has received from naturalists around the world.
- 1850 Charles and Emma have another son, Leonard. Charles' daughter Anne begins to feel sick and Charles worries that she might have inherited his illness.
- 1851 Anne's illness become worse and she dies. Charles is devastated. Another son, Horace, is born.
- 1852 Charles spends the year on his barnacle research.
- 1853 Charles receives the highest accolade the Royal Society of London for the Improvement of Natural Knowledge can bestow — the Royal Medal — for his three-volume work on the geology of the *Beagle* voyage and for his barnacle research.
- 1854 Charles works out that competition is a driving force that causes new species to arise.
- 1855 Charles pays attention to the spread of species, particularly on islands like the Galapagos, and gathers evidence for his idea that plants and animals can spread across bodies of water by 'floating'. He obtains further evidence of species variation by becoming a pigeon breeder.
- 1856 Charles reads a paper from naturalist Alfred Wallace — *On the Law which has Regulated the Introduction of New Species*. Although it contains ideas similar to some of his own, he is not impressed. Charles and Emma have another son, Charles.
- 1857 Charles sends a short version of his theory of natural selection to Asa Gray, professor of Natural History at Harvard University. He replies to a letter from Alfred Wallace stating that he has been working on the problem of species origins for twenty years, but is not ready to publish.

- 1858 Charles receives a paper from Alfred Wallace on the origin of species. It is very similar to the theory he has been working on for over twenty years. His son Charles dies. To a mixed reaction of shock, excitement and stunned silence, Darwin's and Wallace's papers on the means of natural selection are read at a meeting of the Linnean Society in London.
- 1859 Charles' book *On the Origin of Species* is finally published.

## Post On the Origin of Species events

- 1861 Charles notices, while on holidays, that only particular insects pollinate one variety of orchid. He begins to study how the petal designs of orchids attract bees and moths and how this relationship might have evolved. Just two years after its original publication, his book *On the Origin of Species* is now available in German, French and Dutch.
- 1863 Charles had thought that transitional fossils would be found that would provide further evidence for his theory and in this year the lizard-bird fossil Archaeopteryx is discovered. It is bird-like but with teeth and a bony tail found only in lizards. His book *On the Origin of Species* is translated into Italian.
- 1864 Charles publishes his book *The Movement and Habits of Climbing Plants*. He is awarded the Copley Medal by the Royal Society.
- 1867 Charles decides to publish his book on sexual selection in two parts — *Descent of Man* and *Selection in Relation to Sex*. His theory of evolution is now established in most of Europe.
- 1871 Charles' book *Descent of Man* is published.
- 1872 Charles' book *The Expressions of the Emotions in Man and Animals* is published.
- 1875 Charles' book *Insectivorous Plants* is published.
- 1876 Charles finishes his autobiography. He and Emma become grandparents for the first time but their daughter-in-law, Amy Ruck, dies a few days after the birth of the child.
- 1877 Charles receives an honorary Doctorate of Law from Cambridge University.
- 1878 Charles' biography of his grandfather, *Erasmus Darwin*, is published.
- 1881 Charles' *The formation of vegetable mould, through the Actions of Worms, with Observations on their Habitats* is published.
- 1882 Charles dies and is buried in Westminster Abbey.