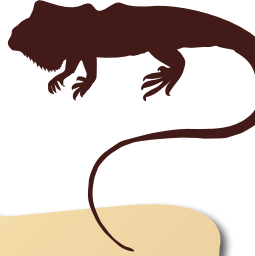


## The Story of Charles Darwin



1

Charles was born on February 12, 1809 in Shrewsbury, Shropshire.

He came from a long line of scientists: his father was a medical doctor and his grandfather was a botanist (someone who studies plants).

Charles was not the most academic individual, instead he adored exploring nature and had an extensive beetle collection.

2

Towards the end of school, Charles' father wanted him to follow in his footsteps and become a doctor but even the sight of blood made Charles sick and woozy. So instead he went to university to become a clergyman.

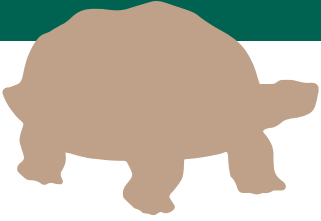
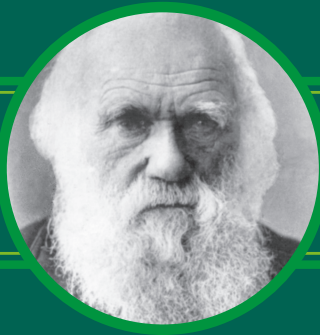
However, his real passion was to become a naturalist, someone who studies the natural world and its history. Little did he know his dream was about to become a reality.

3

After Charles graduated, his friend – a great Botany professor – recommended him for a five year trip aboard the naval ship HMS Beagle. Charles' role would be to collect and make notes on the animals and plants they saw along the way.

While the HMS Beagle was sailing around South America it stopped off on a group of isolated islands called the Galapagos. The animals he saw there were unique – iguanas that swam in the sea and giant tortoises! But the most interesting thing for Charles was the finches, which all had different shaped beaks.





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4

Charles wondered why the bird's beaks might be different. After observing the birds for a long time he saw that each beak was suited to the type of food the bird ate – long, thin beaks for catching insects and short, fat beaks for cracking nuts.

Charles had an amazing idea: perhaps all the birds had evolved or changed depending on the kind of food available.

For instance, where there were lots of insects, birds with long, thin beaks survived better and had more offspring.

This was 'natural selection' – nature was selecting the best varieties to survive and reproduce.

And so the theory of evolution by natural selection was born.

5

After coming up with such a revolutionary idea you might have thought that Charles would be desperate to publish but instead he kept his ideas largely a secret.

At the time people believed that all living things, including humans, were made by God and had remained the same ever since. To suggest otherwise, would have made a lot of people angry.

So for 23 years Charles kept quiet, until one day he received a letter from a fellow naturalist named Alfred Russel Wallace who had just had the same idea as Charles!

Charles decided it was now or never and finally published his theory in a book.

6

Charles' book *On the Origin of Species* was an instant success – the first batch of books sold out within a day!

However as predicted people were upset by his ideas and cartoons even compared him to an ape. But this did not stop him, he carried on publishing and slowly people began to accept his ideas.

Charles died in 1882 when he was 73. By this point the public loved him so much that they made parliament bury him in Westminster Abbey – a great honour.

Today the theory of evolution by natural selection is considered a cornerstone of modern Biology.

