Charles Darwin

1809-1882
This scientist produced a prolific array of work during his lifetime. Of his 19 books, his most famous and historic work *On the Origin of Species* was published in 1859 when he was exactly 50 years old. There has been much speculation as to why he waited so long to publish his ideas on the origin of species following the return from his voyage in 1836.

He was born in Shrewsbury, England, on February 12, 1809, sharing the same birthday with Abraham Lincoln. His father Robert was a wealthy physician with one of the largest medical practices outside London. His paternal grandfather Erasmus was both a physician and a celebrated nature writer. As a young boy, he developed an interest in natural history but started his advanced schooling at Edinburgh in medicine, a subject he soon learned to detest. Later at Cambridge, where he went to prepare for a career in the clergy, he showed no interest in his theological studies, but became acquainted with a botany professor, the Rev. John Henslow, who was destined to become his mentor and to have a profound effect on his life. It was Henslow who encouraged him, following his graduation from Cambridge, to take an extended sea voyage and exploration of the world outside of England. He took advantage of the opportunity -- without pay -- and became expedition naturalist and gentlemen's companion to Captain Robert Fitzroy, on the HMS Beagle. The intended 3-year voyage stretched to 5 years, and he had wonderful experiences as he circumnavigated the world, spending over three years of the five exploring the coastline, flora, and fauna of southern South America.

Upon his return to England he arranged his notes and read voraciously in all fields of science, filling notebook after notebook with his insights. Finally, in 1838, he put his ideas together in what eventually became his theory of evolutionary change and the origin of species by a process of natural selection. He expanded these ideas into a 35-page paper and then into a longer 230-page paper, in 1842 and 1844, respectively. However, he did not publish his ideas at this time, apparently intending to keep working to produce a larger, more impressive book.
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