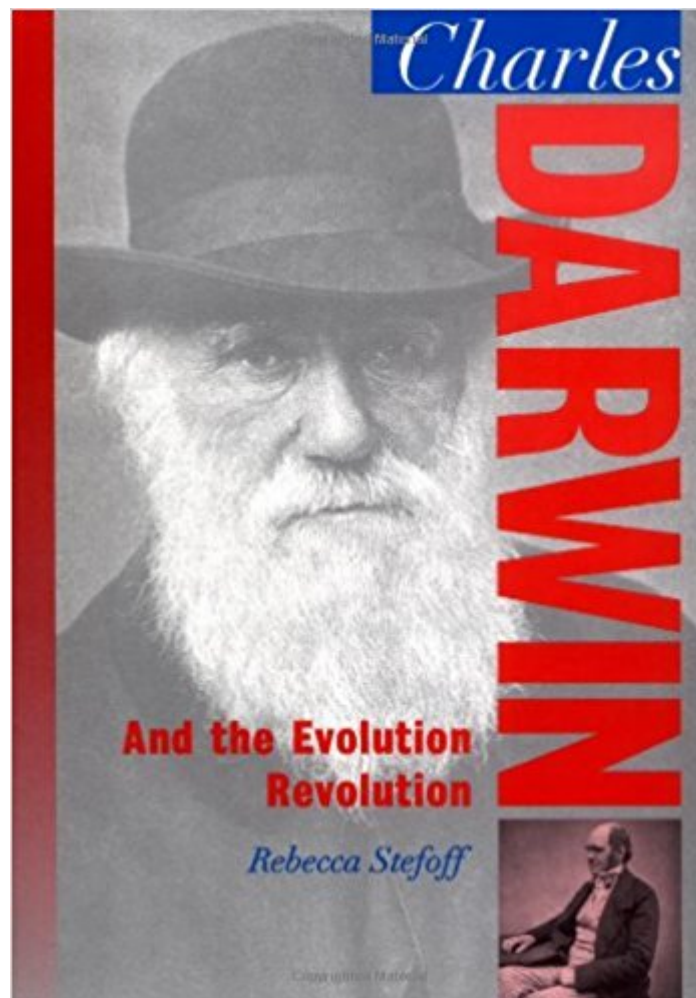




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Charles Darwin: And The Evolution Revolution (Oxford Portraits In Science)



Synopsis

On the Origin of Species, published in 1858, transformed our view of the world and made Charles Darwin one of the most controversial figures in science. This biography begins much earlier with his long search for a profession, his five-year voyage around the world on the Beagle, and the decades-long intellectual journey he made in his study and garden. But it is for his theory about the origin of man and natural selection that he is remembered. His book threw the scientific community into a heated debate that continues today, and has made evolutionary biology one of the liveliest areas of science. This new biography looks at the person behind the controversy whose earth-shaking discoveries and ideas remain as exciting and interesting as today's headlines.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Grade 7 Up?This portrait of a scientist "whose work has shaped our understanding of the natural world" is not only an excellent biography but also a fine introduction to evolutionary biology.

Information on Darwin's childhood and education shows how his early passion for natural history provided background for the meticulous observations he made during his 5-year-long voyage on the HMS Beagle, the formulation of his theory of evolution, and the 20 years of additional research that he undertook before publishing On the Origin of Species in 1859. Steffoff gives the main points of Darwin's theory of "descent with modification" and effectively quotes the scientist's writings to

communicate how his theory was influenced by the work of others and his desire to amass supportive data in anticipation of every possible objection. The author deals with the opposition that Darwin encountered on religious grounds and from fellow scientists in a particularly insightful fashion. She considers the path to general acceptance of the man's theory as part of science and common thought and addresses the on-going controversy surrounding Darwinism today.

Well-captioned black-and-white archival photographs, reproductions, and drawings; a chronology, and two-or-three-page sidebars all extend the text. The impressive list for further reading includes titles by Darwin, books on his life and work, and on Darwinism and evolution. A well-written, thoroughly engaging biography. ?Carolyn Angus, The Claremont Graduate School, CA Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Gr. 9[^]-12. Budding evolutionary biologists will welcome this thoroughly researched biography, which emphasizes Darwin's tremendous influence in scientific, social, and political spheres. Sidebars offer concise, helpful summaries of important concepts, such as extinction and Mendelian genetics. An exception is the sidebar, "What Is a Species?" which does not reflect the complexity of the current definition of the term and demands more references than are given. Extensive photos of Darwin and his family, friends, and colleagues, as well as reproductions of public notices and cartoons, are handsome additions to the nicely laid-out text. There are no footnotes, but the solid bibliography cites many academic works and some children's biographies. The book will have limited appeal, though it offers generally thorough, clear explanations of Darwin's scientific theories and sheds light on his personality. Debbie Carton --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

This volume is one in a series of biographies of scientists -- "Oxford Portraits in Science" -- intended for young adults. Its goal is to kindle their interest in the process of scientific discovery. Embellished with boxed inserts on various topics in evolutionary biology (What is a species? How do organisms pass inherited traits from generation to generation?), this little volume explores the life and habits of one of the most influential but reclusive scientists of the 19th century -- Charles Darwin. Steffoff is an excellent, lucid writer, and her book contains numerous moving passages on Darwin's personal losses and triumphs. Readers learn of Darwin's sometimes grueling, sometimes depressing, sometimes exhilarating, voyage on the Beagle as well as his childhood and education, his lifelong friendships, his marriage and romantic life, his recurring bouts of illness, his extraordinary productivity against the backdrop of these things, and his reticence to finish his magnum opus "On the Origin of Species", for fear of public ridicule and condemnation. Readers meet both the most

prominent defenders and defilers of Darwin's ideas, and see how Darwin formulated his insights about natural selection and the mutability of biological life. Steffoff is an historian and not an evolutionary biologist. Thus it is perhaps unsurprising that some of her details on evolutionary biology are oversimplified or wrong. For example, the insert box on the theory of "punctuated equilibria" actually describes the theory of "coordinated stasis". The latter has been embraced by many proponents of punctuated equilibria, and the two are by no means incompatible, but they are not the same. Unfortunately, some historical details are wrong as well. For example, Steffoff claims that, in 1852, Herbert Spencer "argued in a magazine article that species had evolved, although he did not attempt to describe HOW they evolved" (p. 84). To the contrary, Spencer's 1852 essay titled "A Theory of Population" formed the basis of his later claim to have preceded Darwin in the discovery of natural selection. In "A Theory of Population", Spencer did in fact offer a mechanistic theory of evolution via "selection" (albeit one that differs markedly from, and in some ways is antithetical to, Darwin's). Spencer viewed "selection" as the motor of "progressive" or social evolution -- not as a mechanism of local, environmental adaptation. For Spencer, selection would be the vehicle of its own demise -- the means through which human utopia, which Spencer thought was the goal of "progressive" evolution, would eventually be attained. Overall, however, this little book is quite accessible to readers with little background in biology. It is well illustrated, though mostly with records of historic interest. Younger readers will inevitably learn something about evolution and more about a somewhat timid man who, driven by an enormous intellect and a burning desire to understand nature, himself "evolves" from a rich kid who likes hunting and collecting beetles into a veritable legend in both science and popular culture -- all the while being cruelly portrayed by opponents of evolution.

perfect

This is a very short book that serves as a good introductory book about the life of Charles Darwin and his importance to science. However, if you want to dig deep into the man and his achievements, you'll have to read a whole lotta more... Anyway, this book completely attends its purpose: a brief biography that will make you want to know more.

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