

REPORT

The complete work of Charles Darwin online

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Perhaps no one has influenced our knowledge of life as much as Charles Darwin. His theory of evolution by natural selection, now the unifying theory of biology, explained how all of the astonishingly diverse kinds of living things in the world are related. His theory reconciled a host of diverse kinds of evidence such as the succession of fossil forms in the geological record, the geographical distribution of species, recapitulative appearances in embryology, homologous structures, vestigial organs and nesting taxonomic relationships. In further works Darwin demonstrated that the difference between humans and other animals is one of degree not kind. In zoology, taxonomy, botany, palaeontology, philosophy, anthropology, psychology, literature and theology Darwin's writings engendered profound reactions, many of which still continue.

Yet even without his evolutionary works, Darwin's place in the history of science would be difficult to match. His brilliantly original work in geology, botany, biogeography, psychology, taxonomy and scientific travel writing would be enough to justify his rank as one of the most original and influential men in the history of science.

Darwin's writings are consequently of interest to an unusually wide variety of readers. It is to provide Darwin's writings free online that *The complete work of Charles Darwin online* has been organized. The project, designed and directed by Dr John van Wyhe (University of Cambridge), has been made possible by a generous three-year Resource Enhancement Grant by the Arts and Humanities Research Council awarded to Professor James Secord (Department of History and Philosophy of Science, University of Cambridge) and Professor Janet Browne (Wellcome Trust Centre for the History of Medicine, University College London). The project is hosted by the Cambridge Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (CRASSH), an ideal location for interdisciplinary work and close to the Darwin archive in Cambridge University Library. The project will also employ a postdoctoral research associate for manuscript transcription and to assist with editorial research. A complete set of Darwin's published works will also be published in print. A major interdisciplinary conference is also planned.

By integrating Darwin's books, articles and manuscripts with a full search engine and bibliographical catalogue, the site will be invaluable to students and scholars in the fields of history, history of science, literature, philosophy, the natural sciences and lay readers throughout the world. The project will digitize Darwin's complete publications and private manuscripts (excluding letters, which are already being published by the Darwin Correspondence Project) in two forms: searchable text and facsimile image. The publications

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include 42 volumes written or edited by Darwin and 246 shorter publications such as articles. The site will include all editions in English of Darwin's work published in his lifetime, and all known journal articles; variant editions and issues will also be provided in full, rather than corrected passages alone. There are plans to also include translations into other languages. Complete bibliographical information will be provided with each text. The Charles Darwin Trust is generously supplying most of the original volumes to be digitized from the Quentin Keynes bequest. Canonical secondary sources will also be included such as Richard Darwin Keynes' edition of Darwin's *Zoology notes* from the *Beagle* voyage,¹ Nora Barlow's edition of Darwin's *Autobiography* (1958)² and Francis Darwin's *Life and letters* (1887).³ In addition, Darwin's works will be enriched with links to complete contemporary reviews and related texts cited by Darwin. The site will be organized around a comprehensive database with entries for every known Darwin publication and manuscript worldwide. The site will be fully searchable, with hyperlinks interconnecting material. It will be the most complete, accessible and authoritative scholarly resource on Darwin ever created. The site (<http://darwin-online.org.uk>) should be launched within the next few months.

FURTHER DETAILS

The leading concern is to provide high-quality electronic copies of primary historical source materials quickly and cost-effectively to the world. It is important that primary materials be used and searched in ways unrestricted by the interests or forethought of editors. We shall therefore not provide a variorum edition. Minimal but sufficient editorial matter will be provided. The project will not invest in costly and time-consuming thick encoding of texts so as to provide much more primary material with the same resources. Manuscript transcriptions will be given in clear text form, using Tanselle's editorial principles. Deletions and insertions will be recorded when significant.

The site will include a split-screen facility that will allow users to see the actual manuscript next to the transcript, thus rendering it unnecessary to invest in labour-intensive editorial notation of, for example, the fact that a passage was written in the margin. This will also allow users to compare different editions or different works side by side.

In the first instance, through the courtesy of Cambridge University Library, scans of microfilm images of the manuscripts will be used to make them available quickly on the Internet. In the future it is hoped that, with further funding, the manuscripts will be scanned digitally at high resolution in colour.

The project will begin by first verifying a number of pre-existing manuscript transcriptions, provided by other scholars. To discover which untranscribed manuscripts are most desirable and to avoid duplication of effort, members of the Darwin research community were asked which manuscripts were most needed. These responses have been assembled to prioritize manuscript transcription. One of the first transcriptions will therefore be Darwin's *Beagle* pocket notebooks with the permission of English Heritage.

The backbone of the site will be a database consisting of a complete bibliographical and manuscript catalogue interlinking the entire collection of texts and images. The catalogue will list all known Darwin manuscripts in the world and links to those that have been digitized.

The catalogue will also incorporate Richard Freeman's *Bibliographical handlist* (1977).⁴ Reproduction permission has been granted by the copyright owner, The Charles Darwin Trust, together with many unpublished corrections.

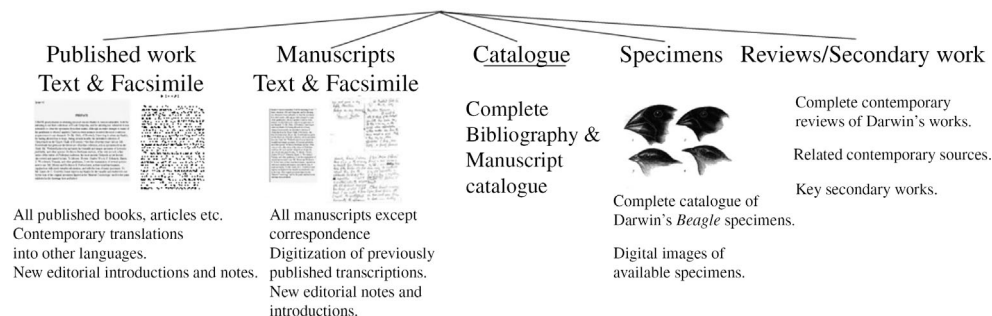


Figure 1. A graphical representation of content and scope of *The complete works of Charles Darwin online* website.

Editorial introductions will place each work in context and provide an overview of content and significance. As far as possible, inexplicit references and persons will be identified. References to other writings by Darwin or other authors will be rendered into links taking the reader directly to the text referred to. Each of Darwin's books will be accompanied by links to digitized contemporary reviews. Translations will be provided for non-English passages. All of the digitized texts will retain page or folio numbers and full formatting such as italics, allowing them to be used and cited by scholars in conventional ways. For a graphical representation of the eventual content and scope of the website, see figure 1.

Until the new *Complete work of Charles Darwin online* website is launched, readers are invited to use the pilot website, *The writings of Charles Darwin on the web* (<http://pages.britishlibrary.net/charles.darwin/>), which contains most of Darwin's published works with a simple search engine.

NOTES

- 1 R. Keynes (ed.), *Charles Darwin's zoology notes & specimen lists from H.M.S. Beagle* (Cambridge University Press, 2000).
- 2 N. Barlow (ed.), *The autobiography of Charles Darwin, 1809–1882: with original omissions restored* (Collins, London, 1958).
- 3 F. Darwin (ed.), *The life and letters of Charles Darwin* (3 volumes) (John Murray, London, 1887).
- 4 R. B. Freeman (ed.), *The works of Charles Darwin: an annotated bibliographical handlist*, 2nd edn (Dawson, Folkestone, 1977).