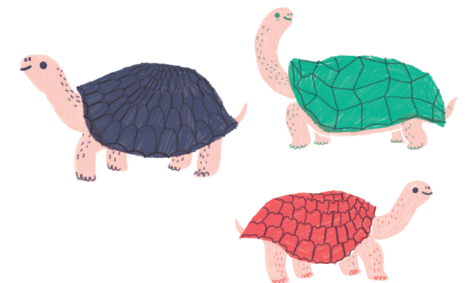
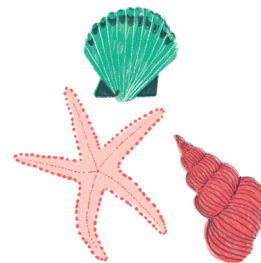




Charles Darwin is famous for his theory of evolution by natural selection – a theory that helps us explain life on Earth.

Charles' idea that living things change over time and adapt to the place where they live is one of the most important discoveries in science. In the 1800s and 1900s, it changed the way people thought about the world.

The theory of evolution by natural selection did not come to Charles in one 'lightbulb moment'. It was the result of many decades of patient work, building on the ideas of scientists who had gone before him.



As he was growing up, no one would have guessed that young Charles was going to change the world. He was born in 1809 into a large and wealthy family. The Darwins lived in Shrewsbury, England, in a big house called the Mount.


Charles grew up with four sisters and a brother. Like every other rich boy in nineteenth-century England, he enjoyed tearing about the countryside, riding, hunting, birdwatching and fishing.



The following year, Charles was sent to a boarding school. It was rules, rules, rules. He hated all the lessons he had to learn, and continued to get up to mischief instead. Charles was happiest when he was alone outdoors.

The headmaster got cross with Charles for wasting his time outside when he should have been learning Latin and Greek. But Charles was developing a passion for collecting and an eye for detail that would one day help him to understand nature in a brand new way.





Charles clearly wasn't going to cut it as a doctor, so his dad let him leave Edinburgh. It was time for Plan B – studying at the University of Cambridge to become a clergyman.

Charles had a great time. Once again, he found a group of friends who were interested in the natural world. He spent more time studying plants than religion, and got a reputation as one of the best beetle-collectors in Cambridge.

One day while out 'beetling', Charles spotted a beauty hiding under some bark. But he already had a rare beetle in each hand, so he popped one of them into his mouth so he could pick up the third.

To my unspeakable disgust and pain, the little inconsiderate beast squirted acid down my throat!

Charles spat out the beetle and watched in dismay as the third beetle got away too!

The voyage would be the biggest event of Charles' life, but first he had to meet Captain Fitzroy. The meeting seemed to go well. It was only later that Charles found out he almost lost the job because of the shape of his nose!

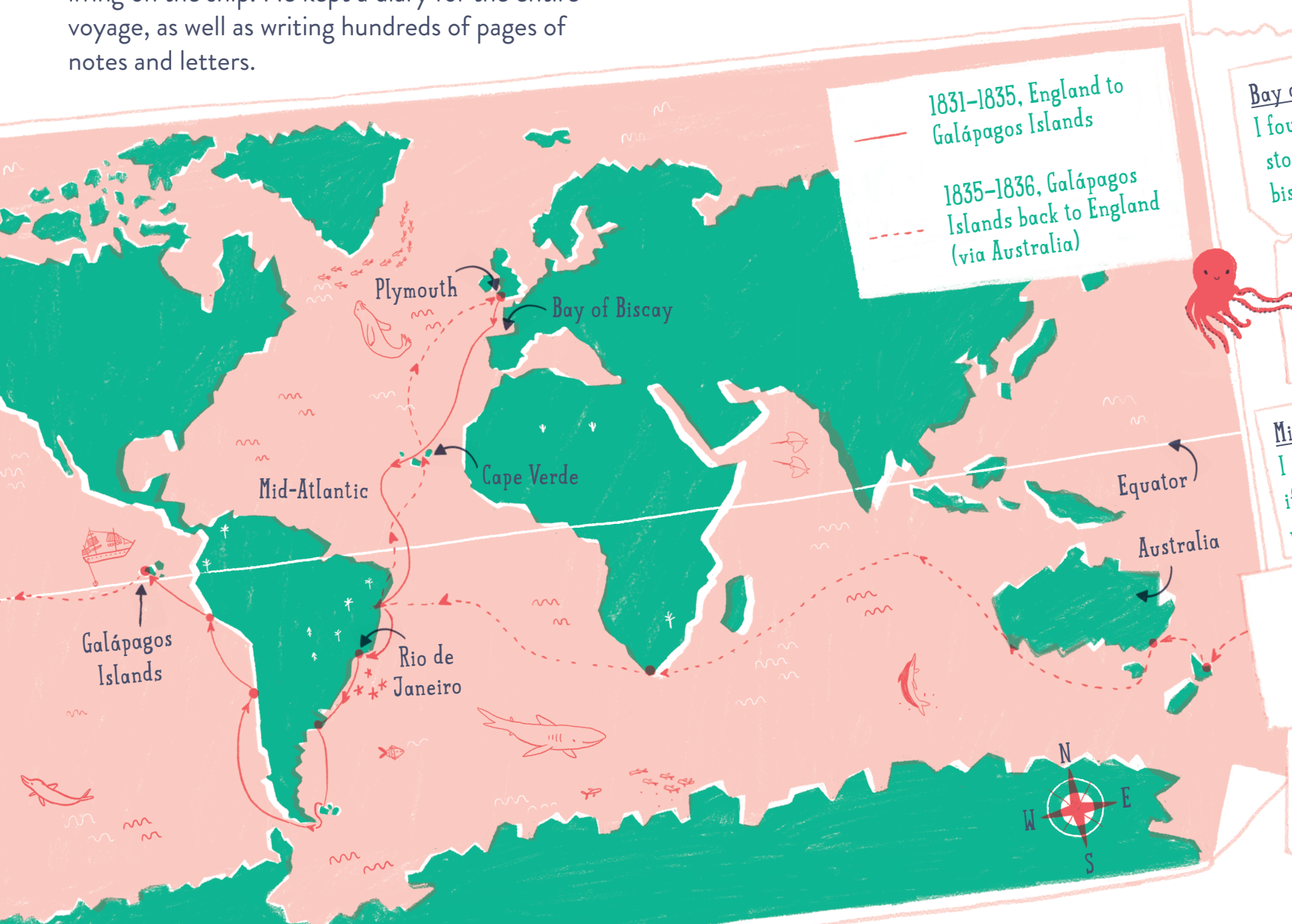


When everything was agreed, Charles rushed around buying equipment for the two-year voyage:



Little did Charles know, it would actually be five years before he returned to England.

On 27 December 1831, HMS *Beagle* finally set sail. Even though Charles was often sea-sick, he enjoyed living on the ship. He kept a diary for the entire voyage, as well as writing hundreds of pages of notes and letters.



Plymouth, Dec 1831

These two months in Plymouth were the most miserable which I ever spent.

Bay of Biscay, Dec 1831

I found the only thing my stomach would bear was biscuit & raisins.

Cape Verde, Jan 1832

Collecting loads of amazing octopuses. Why would God put so much beauty out here, where there is no one to see it?

Mid-Atlantic, Feb 1832

I find a ship a very comfortable house... if it was not for sea-sickness the whole world would be sailors.

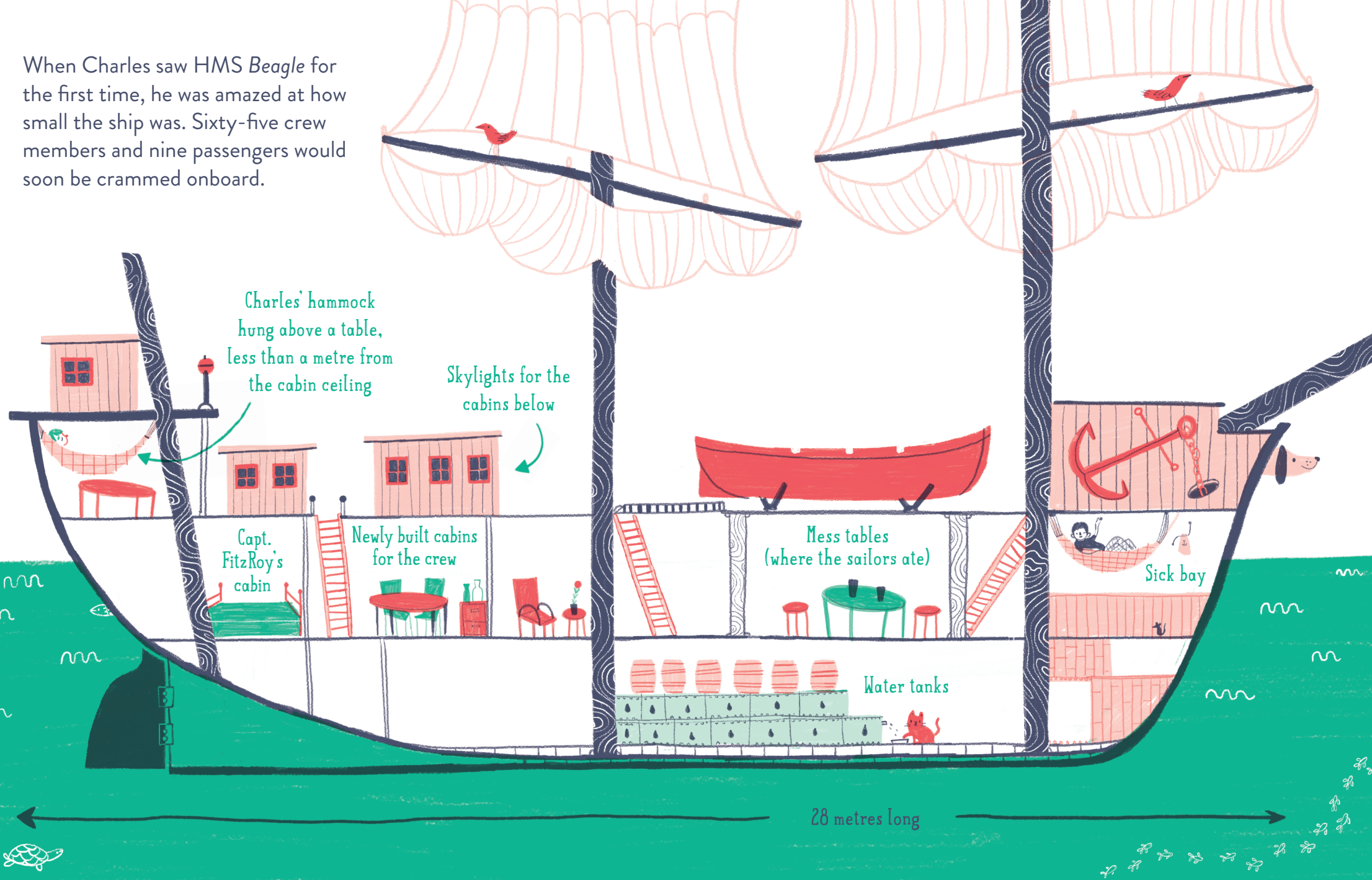
Equator, Feb 1832

Those that have never crossed the Equator are dunked, shaved and treated roughly. Great fun.

Rio, June 1832

I am red-hot with spiders!

When Charles saw HMS *Beagle* for the first time, he was amazed at how small the ship was. Sixty-five crew members and nine passengers would soon be crammed onboard.

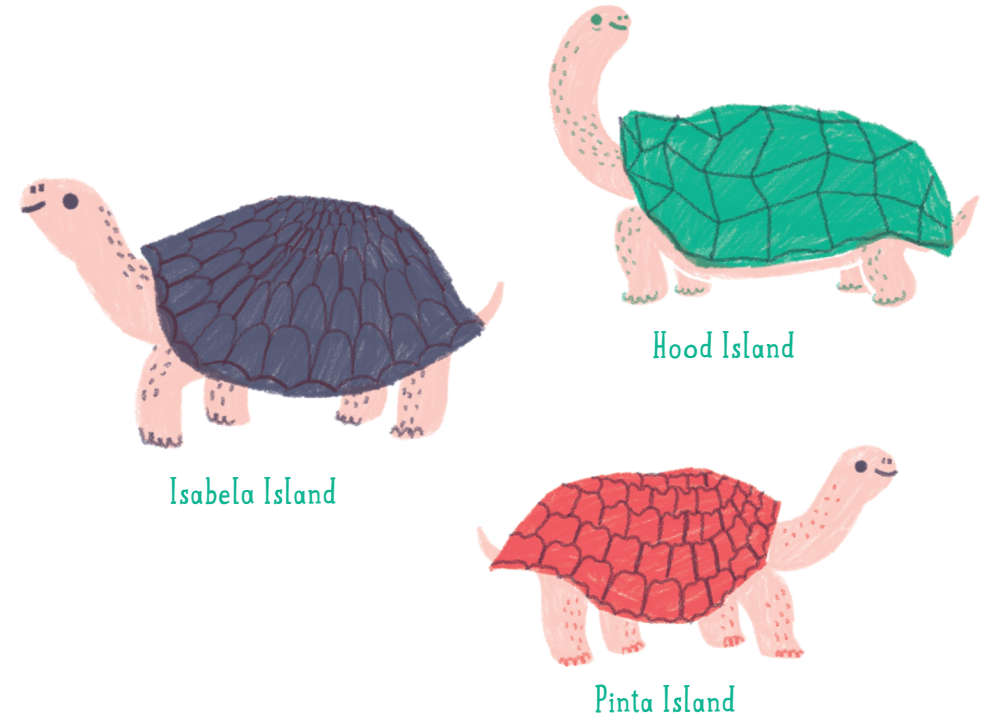


Charles noticed that the plants and animals looked a bit like those he had seen on the mainland, but with some important differences. Even between the individual islands, Charles could spot differences.

Some of the oddest inhabitants were the enormous tortoises. These lumbering giants were large enough to ride and they hissed when anyone got too close to them!



The governor of the Galápagos Islands told Charles that he could tell which island a tortoise came from just by looking at the shape of its shell.



This got Charles thinking, and for the last two years of his voyage he wondered about the origins of these various species. But it wouldn't be until he got home that he would realise just how important these differences were.

Charles was becoming famous for all the fantastic fossils and specimens he'd collected on the *Beagle* voyage. There were 1,529 bottled species and 3,907 labelled specimens, so it took Charles and his friends years to sort and catalogue them all! In 1845, he collected his tales of adventure into a book, which was a big hit.

Full title: *A Naturalist's Voyage;
Journal of researches into the natural
history and geology of the countries visited
during the voyage of H.M.S. Beagle round
the world, under the command of
Captain Fitzroy, R.N.*

Snappy title!

But Charles wasn't satisfied with writing about his adventures. His mind was still buzzing with unanswered questions about the things he had seen on his long voyage. How did all those different species of plants and animals come to be on the planet? This is what Charles would later call the 'mystery of mysteries'.



Charles Darwin died in 1882, aged 73. He was honoured with a burial in London's Westminster Abbey, close to Isaac Newton (another super-famous scientist).

Since his death, Charles has become even more famous and his name is remembered around the world...

...in the names
of animals...

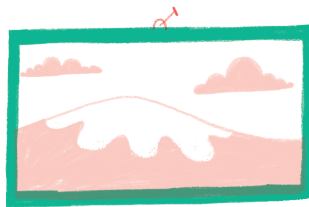


Darwin's frog



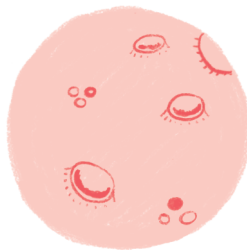
Darwin's finch

...in place names...



Mount Darwin
in South America

...and even in space.



Darwin crater
on the Moon

Charles is a towering figure in the history of science. His power was learning to look at things closely, and his natural curiosity about the world kept him asking questions. Most importantly, he wasn't afraid to be honest about what he saw, even if it led him to radical conclusions.



TIMELINE

1809

Charles Darwin is born in Shrewsbury, England, on 12 February.

1817

Charles' mother dies and he is looked after by his older sisters.



1818

Charles is sent to a boarding school in Shrewsbury.



1825

Charles' dad enrolls him at Edinburgh University to study medicine.



1827

Charles quits medical school and begins studying theology at the University of Cambridge.

1828

Preferring to study the natural world, Charles starts attending botany classes and becomes an excellent beetle-collector.



1831

Charles is told about an opportunity aboard HMS *Beagle*.

The ship departs and Charles begins his five-year voyage.

1832

HMS *Beagle* visits Tenerife, Cape Verde, Brazil, Argentina and Tierra del Fuego.



1833

HMS *Beagle* visits the Falkland Islands.

Throughout the voyage, Charles makes notes and collects plant and animal specimens.

1834

HMS *Beagle* sails around Cape Horn (the tip of South America) and up the coast of Chile.



1835

Charles spends five weeks exploring the Galápagos Islands.



1836

After visiting Australia, HMS *Beagle* sails around the Cape of Good Hope (in South Africa), returns to Brazil and then finally arrives back in England.

1837-8

Charles begins thinking about evolution and puzzling over the origin of species.



1839

Charles marries Emma Wedgwood.



1842

Charles moves out of London to Down House in Kent.



1840s-1850s

Gradually, Charles' theory of evolution by natural selection falls into place. He starts writing down his ideas, but he doesn't publish them.

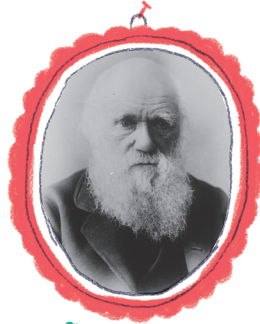


1858

Alfred Russel Wallace sends Charles a theory about evolution which is shockingly similar to Charles' own ideas. Both theories are read out at a meeting in London.

1859

On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection is published.



Charles Darwin

1860

Discussion about Charles' book takes place up and down the country.



1871

The Descent of Man is published. In this book, Charles applies his theory of evolution to humans.

1882

Charles dies on 19 April, aged 73.



Today

Since Charles' death, new evidence has been found to support his theory of evolution by natural selection.

Charles Darwin is one of the most famous scientists of all time, remembered for his attention to detail and his limitless curiosity about the natural world.