

Darwin egg from Beagle voyage found by museum volunteer

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(PhysOrg.com) -- An egg collected by Charles Darwin while on HMS Beagle - and thought to be the last such specimen known to exist - has been rediscovered by an octogenarian volunteer at Cambridge University's Zoology Museum.

And records seem to indicate that Darwin himself was responsible for damage caused to the heavily cracked egg after packing it in too small a box during or following his famous voyage from 1831-36.

The chocolate brown egg, one of 16 collected on the naturalist's trip, was among the many items being catalogued by volunteer Liz Wetton.

Liz has spent half a day at the Museum each week for the past ten years where she faithfully sorts and reboxes the Museum's bird egg collection.

She merely commented the specimen had C. Darwin written on it before moving to the next drawer.

But it was only when Collections Manager Mathew Lowe was reviewing her work that he discovered no one knew about the existence of this specimen.

He said: "There are so many historical treasures in the collection, Liz did not realise this was a new discovery. To have rediscovered a Beagle specimen in the 200th year of Darwin's birth is special enough, but to have evidence that Darwin himself broke it is a wonderful twist."

After reading Liz's notes, Lowe and Curator of Ornithology Dr Mike Brooke, traced the specimen's origin in the notebook of Professor Alfred Newton, a friend of Darwin's and Professor of Zoology in the latter 19th Century.

Newton had written: "One egg, received through Frank Darwin, having been sent to me by his father who said he got it at Maldonado (Uruguay) and that it belonged to the Common Tinamou of those parts.

"The great man put it into too small a box and hence its unhappy state."

Museum Director Professor Michael Akam said: "This find shows just how valuable the work of our loyal volunteers is to the Museum. Only Liz has examined each of the many thousands of [eggs](#) in our collection. Without her we would not have found this unique specimen."

Volunteer Liz Wetton said: "It was an exhilarating experience. After working on the egg collections for ten years this was a tremendous thing to happen."

Provided by University of Cambridge ([news](#) : [web](#))

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