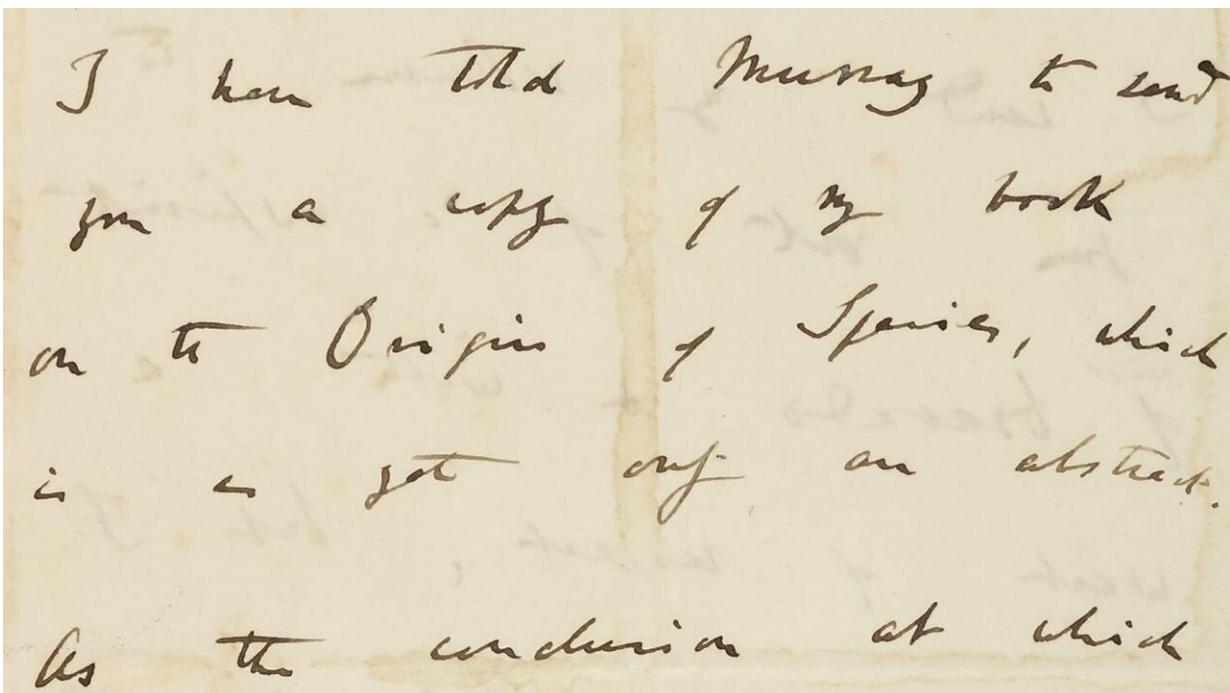


Darwin's handwritten pages from 'On the Origin of Species' go online for the first time

November 23 2020



Darwin's handwritten letter to his former geology professor at Cambridge where he first mentioned his radical new book, *On the Origin of Species* Credit: Reproduced with the kind permission of a private collection, USA, and William Huxley Darwin

An extraordinary collection of priceless manuscripts of naturalist Charles Darwin goes online today, including two rare pages from the original draft of *On the Origin of Species*.

These documents will be added to Darwin Online, a website which contains not only the complete works of Darwin, but is possibly the most comprehensive scholarly portal on any historical individual in the world. The website is helmed by Dr. John van Wyhe, an eminent historian of science. He is a Senior Lecturer at the National University of Singapore's (NUS) Department of Biological Sciences, and Tembusu College.

"Darwin wrote the first draft of *On the Origin of Species* by hand. But the historical significance of this work was not yet known and almost all the manuscript was lost—with his children even using the pages as drawing paper! As such, these two pages are extremely rare survivors, and give unprecedented insight into the making of the book that changed the world," explained Dr. van Wyhe.

Access to these rare artifacts comes exactly 161 years after the initial publication of *On the Origin of Species* on 24 November 1859, and coincides with Evolution Day, which commemorates the anniversary of this revolutionary book.

An unbelievably rare collection

Despite being one of the most important scientific works of all time, only a few portions of the original handwritten *On the Origin of Species* manuscript survive. Those which are being added to the Darwin Online project are two of only nine pages in private hands.

Other important [manuscripts](#) going online today include a draft page from Darwin's other most revolutionary work *The Descent of Man*, and even the receipt for the book from Darwin's publisher, "for the Sum of Six Hundred and thirty pounds for the first edition, consisting of 2,500 copies, of my work on the 'Descent of Man'."

There are also two draft pages from Darwin's seminal *The Expression of*

the Emotions in Man and Animals.

Unprecedented insights into Darwin's work

A [page](#) that has never been made public before is some reading notes on ants that Darwin made during his research for *On the Origin of Species*. The notes informed his examination of slave-making ants which became one of the most widely talked about parts of his famous book.

In addition, there are three very important letters by Darwin. One 1859 letter was written to his former geology professor at Cambridge, Adam Sedgwick, as Darwin nervously sends his radical new *On the Origin of Species*. Two other important letters are to his colleagues, the biologist T. H. Huxley and the botanist Asa Gray.

Darwin's handwriting is notoriously difficult to read. As such, the documents have been transcribed, and can be viewed side-by-side with the original manuscript. The newly released documents can be viewed at Darwin Online.

"Instead of being locked away out of [public view](#), by adding these documents to Darwin Online they became freely available to anyone in the world", shared Dr. van Wyhe.

More information: Darwin online: darwin-online.org.uk/whatsnew.html

Provided by National University of Singapore

Citation: Darwin's handwritten pages from 'On the Origin of Species' go online for the first time (2020, November 23) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2020-11-darwin-.html>

[handwritten-pages-species-online.html](#)

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.