

Young times

An evolved character

Darwin's father despaired of him but he turned out to be the world's most famous biologist

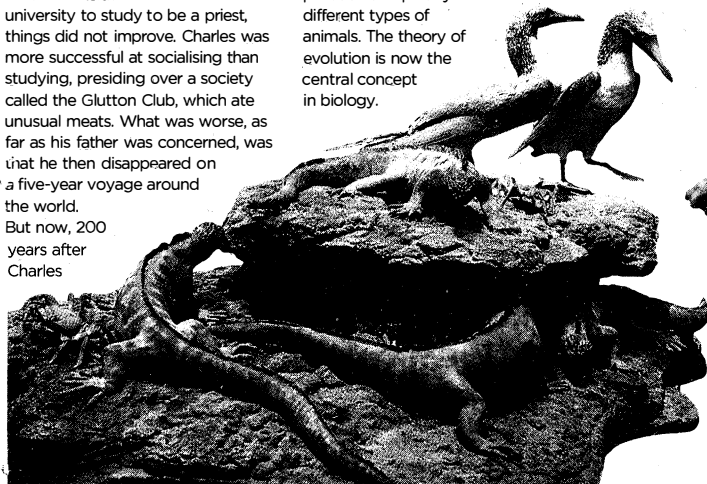
Charles Darwin's father once told him: "You care for nothing but shooting, dogs and rat-catching, and you will be a disgrace to yourself and all your family."

The problem was, Charles came from a distinguished family — one of his grandfathers was a famous scientist, the other was Josiah Wedgwood, whose company still makes pottery. But the young Darwin, the fifth of six children, seemed to be more interested in collecting beetles than learning for exams.

When his father sent him to university to study to be a priest, things did not improve. Charles was more successful at socialising than studying, presiding over a society called the Glutton Club, which ate unusual meats. What was worse, as far as his father was concerned, was that he then disappeared on a five-year voyage around the world. But now, 200 years after Charles

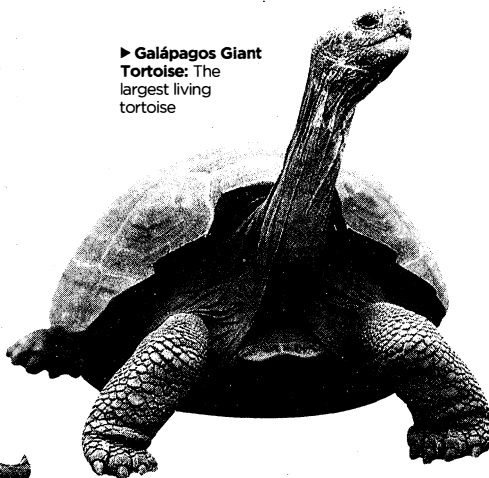
Darwin's birth, he is considered the most important biologist that ever lived, and his father would surely be proud to see that the Natural History Museum in London is holding an exhibition to mark his bicentenary.

During his travels, on a ship called *The Beagle*, Charles saw many new and wonderful animals, and came up with an idea that explains how all life developed. His theory of evolution describes how animals change over thousands of years in order to adapt to their environment, and how these changes can eventually produce completely different types of animals. The theory of evolution is now the central concept in biology.



▲ Charles Darwin at the age of 6 and his sister, Catherine

► Galápagos Giant Tortoise: The largest living tortoise



The Natural History Museum's *Darwin* exhibition opens this Friday and continues until April. Read more about the exhibition on page 14