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Did Darwin lie about discovery of natural selection?

Eminent scientist Charles Darwin did not independently discover the theory of 'natural selection' as he claimed – and probably copied the ideas for his 1859 book *The Origin of Species*, new research suggests.

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Eminent scientist Charles Darwin did not independently discover the theory of 'natural selection' as he claimed – and probably copied the ideas for his 1859 book *The Origin of Species*, new research suggests.

Unique evidence from newly unearthed books and articles has revealed how three of Darwin's close circle read about natural selection in a book published much earlier which, until now, experts believed went unnoticed by him and other Victorian scientists.

I have no doubt, based on the weight of new evidence, that Darwin did read Matthew's book and then went on to replicate his discovery and key themes.

Dr Mike Sutton, Nottingham Trent University

The claims have been made by Dr Mike Sutton, a criminology expert at Nottingham Trent University, following a detailed study involving hi-tech detection, histogrammic and plagiarism checking research methods.

Darwin always maintained he arrived at the theory independently – and denied plagiarism - with no prior knowledge of the ideas of Scottish fruit farmer and botanist Patrick Matthew, who coined the term 'the natural process of selection' in 1832.

He also claimed that no other naturalist known to him was aware of Matthew's published discovery.

He went on to be hailed as the great thinker on the topic of evolution because everyone believed he discovered it independently of Matthew, or anyone else, and because he continued to take the theory forward with confirmatory evidence, convincing others of its validity and importance.

Now, Dr Sutton says he has unearthed a wealth of hidden publications which, together with Darwin's unpublished notes, prove the naturalist lied.

Matthew's book, it is newly discovered, was read and cited by seven naturalists – including Robert Chambers, Prideaux John Selby and John Loudon, who were part of Darwin's close social and scholarly network, and at the epicentre of his acknowledged influence.

It was Matthew's work that convinced Darwin of the importance of natural selection.

Dr Mike Sutton

Matthew wrote about the 'natural process of selection' in his book, *On Naval and Timber and Arboriculture*, which later appeared in Darwin's *The Origin of Species* as the 'process of natural selection'. When Matthew read a review of Darwin's book, which claimed he had independently discovered the theory, he challenged the scientist in the press.

The scientific community at the time simply took Darwin's word for it rather than examine the evidence, said Dr Sutton, who will reveal the findings in his new book, '*Nullius in verba: Darwin's greatest secret*'.

He said: "Contrary to Darwin's claim that Matthew's ideas went completely unnoticed, the newly discovered data proves that his book was, in fact, widely advertised and read.

"I have no doubt, based on the weight of new evidence, that Darwin did read Matthew's book and then went on to replicate his discovery and key themes. It was Matthew's work that convinced Darwin of the importance of natural selection.

"Darwin was awarded scientific priority for natural selection on the grounds that it is not enough simply to discover something first if you then fail to convince anyone of its importance. But that argument only stands up if Darwin was not influenced by Matthew's prior discovery. We can now be certain that he was.

"In my opinion, Charles Darwin committed the greatest known science fraud in history by plagiarising Matthew's complete hypothesis of natural selection, his terminology, observations and creative explanations.

"Without Patrick Matthew, *The Origin of Species* would never have been written. Matthew, not Darwin, should be celebrated as the discoverer of the unifying theory of biology and solver of the origin of species."

'Nullius in verba: Darwin's greatest secret' will be available from Thinker Books.

- **Notes for editors**

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