

The joint Darwin-Wallace paper *On the Tendency of Species to form Varieties ...* might well be considered the most important biological publication of the century, perhaps of all time.

Darwin, Charles, and Alfred Wallace. "The Tendency of Species of form Varieties; and on the Perpetuation of Varieties and Species by Natural Means of Selection," in *Journal of the Proceedings of the Linnean Society*, pp. 45–53. London, 1858.

Were it not for *The Origin of Species* (1859), the joint Darwin-Wallace paper *On the Tendency of Species to form Varieties ...* here reproduced might well be considered the most important biological publication of the century, perhaps of all time. It could equally well be claimed that without the Darwin-Wallace paper, *The Origin of Species* might never have been published. That book, substantial as it is, was a mere abstract of the vast encyclopedic work on natural selection that Darwin was in the course of compiling. He had other diversions from that task: in the period since his formulation of the theory in 1838, he had published three stout volumes (1842–46) on coral reefs and other aspects of the geology of the countries visited by H.M.S. Beagle, and two exhaustive volumes on barnacles (1851–54).

Darwin had written a manuscript sketch of his theory in 1842, but despite repeated urging by such friends and supporters as Sir Joseph Hooker and Sir Charles Lyell to publish, he continued to collect documentation and refine his ideas. The unexpected arrival of a letter from the naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace (1823–1913), then in the Mollucas, on 18th June, 1858, at last spurred Darwin into action. He wrote to Lyell that same day, "Your words have come true with a vengeance—that I should be forestalled ... I never saw a more striking coincidence; if Wallace had my MS. sketch written out in 1842, he could not have made a better short abstract! Even his terms now stand as heads of my chapters."

Darwin's friends immediately rallied round. Lyell and Hooker arranged for joint publication in August 1858 of Wallace's paper along with portions of a letter from Darwin to his close friend the Harvard botanist Asa Gray (1810–88), dated 5th September 1857, containing an outline of his theory, buttressed by extracts from Darwin's

unpublished manuscript “sketched in 1839 and copied in 1844, when the copy was read by Dr. Hooker, and its contents afterwards communicated to Sir Charles Lyell.” The fact that this epoch-making publication attracted little attention at the time only confirmed Darwin in his belief in encyclopedic documentation. As he wrote in his *Autobiography*, the indifferent reception of the Darwin-Wallace paper showed “how necessary it is that any new view should be explained at considerable length in order to arouse public attention.” Reproduced here is a copy of the original issue of the *Journal of the Proceedings of the Linnean Society* in which the paper appeared. It fills pages 45–62 (**Spreads 24–33**).