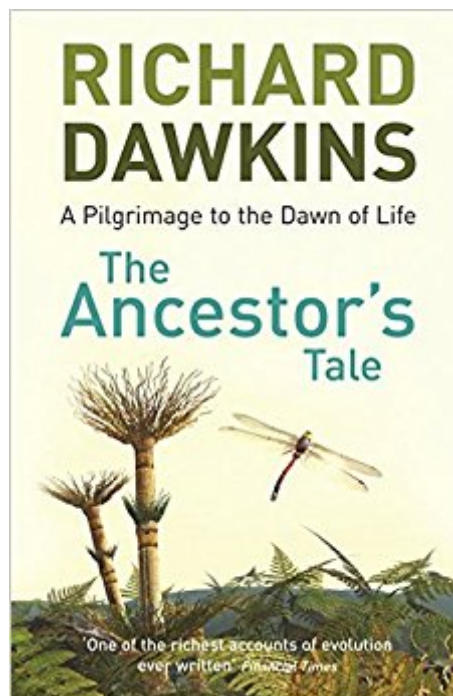




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The Ancestor's Tale (A Pilgrimage To The Dawn Of Life)



Synopsis

"The Ancestor's Tale" is a pilgrimage back through time; a journey on which we meet up with fellow pilgrims as we and they converge on our common ancestors. Chimpanzees join us at about 6 million years in the past, gorillas at 7 million years, orang utans at 14 million years, as we stride on together, a growing band. The journey provides the setting for a collection of some 40 tales. Each explores an aspect of evolutionary biology through the stories of characters met along the way or glimpsed from afar - the "Elephant Bird's Tale", the "Marsupial Mole's Tale", the "Lungfish's Tale". Together they give a deep understanding of the processes that have shaped life on Earth: convergent evolution, the isolation of populations, continental drift, the great extinctions. The tales are interspersed with prologues detailing the journey, route maps showing joining lineages, and life-like reconstructions of our common ancestors. "The Ancestor's Tale" represents a pilgrimage on an unimaginable scale: our goal is four billion years away, and the number of pilgrims joining us grows vast - ultimately encompassing all living creatures. At the end of the journey lies something remarkable in its simplicity and transformative power: the first, humble, replicating molecules. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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Customer Reviews

'fabulous in many ways... lavishly illustrated and brilliantly signposted, with something to amaze on every page, it will be a hard book for non-scientists to put down.' -- John Cornwell THE SUNDAY TIMES 'As a contribution to the history of ideas this book is well worthy of Britain's top public intellectual. The arguments are as sharply honed as we have come to expect from Dawkins.' --

Matt Ridley GUARDIAN 'one of the richest accounts of evolution ever written...the tales of the pilgrims dart around with a delightful unpredictability, propelled like a firecracker by Dawkin's wonderful way with words. He is so good at explaining complex scientific issues that readers will learn painlessly about matters well outside the author's field of evolutionary biology from maths to cosmology...we have no right to expect (another) magnum opus on the scale of THE ANCESTOR'S TALE.' FINANCIAL TIMES 'huge, magisterial and didactic' -- Richard Wentk FOCUS MAGAZINE 'A book which tries, with much brilliance and some success, to treat our vaunted humanity as no more than a tiny episode in a vast drama, equivalent to a couple of seconds of madness at the end of a very long day.' -- Jonathan Ree THE EVENING STANDARD 'As always with Dawkins, the writing is beautiful: economical, vivid and often, both elegant and witty.' -- John Burnside THE SCOTSMAN 'His book, however, should be given to all intelligent young persons starting out on their exploration of the world. It will excite their curiosity and awe and prove to them that the world is inexhaustible in its fascination.' -- Anthony Daniels THE SUNDAY TELEGRAPH 'A new chronicle of life, wonderfully illustrated, from this great evolutionist.' THE ECONOMIST 'THE ANCESTOR'S TALE makes you feel you have seen the world in a fresh, exhilarating way.' -- Robert Hanks THE DAILY TELEGRAPH 'a monumental book.' -- Dick Ahlstrom THE IRISH TIMES 'In this book Dawkins brings together many of the ideas he has put forward elsewhere into a coherent and elegant whole.' -- Crispin Tickell LITERARY REVIEW --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Richard Dawkins is an evolutionary biologist renowned throughout the world. He was educated at Oxford where he did his doctorate under the nobel-prize winning ethologist Niko Tinbergen. From 1967-1969 he was an Assistant Professor at the University of California at Berkley. Since 1995 he has been Charles Simonyi Professor of the Public Understanding of Science at Oxford University. His books rank among the most influential intellectual works of our time. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

An interest way of observing the process of evolution. Richard Dawkins takes you down the road in reverse. Kind of the devolution of the life all the way back to the first signs of ancestral life to all living thing here in planet earth. A bit of an homage to the Canterbury tales throughout. I truly enjoyed this.

I had wanted to read this book for a long time and I have to say I'm disappointed, but not surprised. I

simply do not find Richard Dawkins an engaging science writer at the same level as Carl Sagan, Sean Carroll, or Lawrence Krauss. Dawkins seems to be overly fond of discursive prose that does not effectively -- for me -- emphasize the major points. This seems to be a function of his literary style, which lacks the loveliness and clarity that the English language can convey in the hand of more talented writers. My insistent mental image is that he must write by dictating into a microphone while driving a car. I admire Professor Dawkins very much, I just wish I liked his books more than I do.

Incredibly interesting. The only problem with this book is I find myself writing notes and underlining so many phrases that it is taking me quite a long time to read.

In *The Ancestor's Tale*, Dawkins tells the story of the evolution of life backwards, starting with humans (because we find them interesting, for obvious reasons, not because we are somehow the end point that evolution was working towards - in fact, telling the story backwards is in part an attempt to shake off the impression of inevitability that often comes through in chronological retellings of evolutionary history) to single celled organisms. Dawkins tells the story almost entirely with creatures that are still alive today - telling each new animal's story at the point when the branches of the tree of life converge back in time, and avoiding the need to go into more speculative areas of paleobiology. Along the way, Dawkins introduces many of the methodologies of research in biology and evolution to help us understand why scientists think what they think. The scope of the book is grand, and I get the impression at the end that I've covered nearly as much ground as a traditional college textbook on evolution, but had a lot more fun doing it. Dawkins has argued persuasively that replication had to come before metabolism in the earliest history of life, so my only complaint with the book was that Dawkins didn't provide any of the theories of how viruses fit in with the tree of life. He argues that in the earliest stage of replicators it doesn't really matter if one considers them 'alive', so getting hung up on if viruses are 'living' or not doesn't seem to be a good reason to exclude them from the tale, and I would have liked at least a few paragraphs on the ideas of how viruses evolved. But that petty quibble aside, this book was a brilliant survey. Highly recommended.

All of Dr. Dawkins's books are seminal in their own right; but, most remarkable is *THE ANCESTOR'S TALE: A PILGRIMAGE TO THE DAWN OF EVOLUTION*. In this treatise, Richard Dawkins creatively, eloquently utilizes backward chronology to search out ancestors to "sensibly

aim towards a single distant target." On opposite ends of a small log, he serves as gentle, factual storyteller, bringing us "back to the universal progenitor of all surviving organisms, probably resembling some kind of bacterium." His lexicon includes "rendezvous," "confluence," and, most notably, "concestor." "In a backward chronology, the ancestors of any set of species must eventually meet at a particular geological moment. Their point of rendezvous is the last common ancestor that they all share, what I shall call their 'Concestor': the focal rodent or the focal mammal or the focal vertebrate, say. The oldest concestor is the grand ancestor of all surviving life." And the oldest concestor, according to Dawkins, before animals and plants, before multicellularity, is the single cell progenitor bacteria. "The analogy of insect colony to human body is often made, and it is not a bad one. The majority of our cells subjugate their individuality, devoting themselves to assisting the reproduction of the minority that are capable of it: 'germ-line' cells in the testes or ovaries, whose genes are destined to travel, via sperm or eggs, into the distant future. But genetic relatedness is not the only basis for subjugation of individuality in fruitful division of labor. Any sort of mutual assistance, where each side corrects a deficiency in the other, can be favored by natural selection on both." If I were stranded on an island with access to only one book, ANCESTOR'S TALE would easily be my first choice... - lc

If you can still read very long books, this one is a winner for anyone interested in evolution. In an easy conversational style, author Dawkins takes the reader from now all the way back to the common ancestor of most living beings. It is a daunting task but Dawkins shows that he is up to it. Using the research of many who have gone before, Richard Dawkins ties it all together as he joins various species one after the other on his way back through the ages. The reader will be surprised as to whom our nearest cousins are, and maybe even more surprised at how impersonal evolution seems to be as it tries out and discards various forms of living creatures.

One of the most detailed books on evolution for a non scientific publicum I have ever seen. And even for biologists, it has lots of information and interesting insights. The way Dawkins leads the reader through a backwards history of human evolution is original and amusing. The points he chooses as "rendevouz" are used to explain basic concepts in biology, evolution and related sciences, even good explanations on mathematical tools used in evolutionary studies. After he completes the backwards journey to the origins of life, the last quarter of the book is a little "dry" to read, but this is probably a misperception due to the easy reading of the rest of the book. A good reading for curious non-biologist and also for biologist looking for new ways to teach evolution.

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