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A VERY BIG BIRTHDAY GIFT
 It is said that to mark Charles Darwin's 25th birthday, his friend Captain FitzRoy named a mountain after him. Mount Darwin is in Tierra del Fuego, in Chile.

Would aliens look like you?



Science-fiction films often portray aliens as looking nothing like humans. However, scientists from the University of Oxford have suggested in a new study that if aliens do exist, then they could have evolved through the same process as humans did, so it is possible that they could look like you, too.

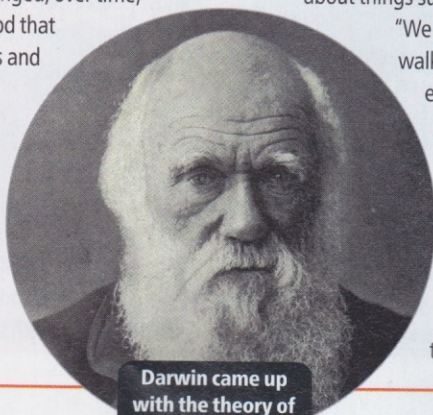
Evolution is the word for the way in which species change over a very long time, with tiny alterations made through the generations, which gradually add up to create different types of animals. In the 19th century, a naturalist (someone who studies plants and animals) called Charles Darwin came up with a theory to explain how and why living things evolve. Darwin noticed that some finches (a type of bird) were different sizes and had different beaks and claws, depending on where they were found. He realised that these differences were because the birds had changed, over time, in order to be able to eat the food that was available, escape predators and survive long enough to produce offspring. Darwin believed that animals that are best adapted to their environment are more likely to survive. He called this process evolution by natural selection.

Scientists involved in the alien study believe that

creatures on another world could evolve by the same process that life on Earth does – through natural selection. Over time, these other-world organisms could well evolve from simple cells into more complex creatures, just like our ancestors did. These creatures would be made up of ingredients that, through trial and error over many generations, have combined in a way that “keep the organism functioning”. In other words, the alien life forms would adapt to survive.

The team admit that working out what aliens would look like is hard because we only have one example to refer to, which is life on Earth. Even so, the idea of evolution is useful because it could apply to creatures that breathe nitrogen instead of oxygen, and life forms that don't have DNA (a chemical inside all animals and plants on Earth that carries information about things such as colouring, shape and size).

“We still can't say whether aliens will walk on two legs or have big green eyes, but we believe evolutionary theory offers a unique tool for trying to understand what aliens will be like,” said Sam Levin, a researcher at Oxford. “We can say that there is a level of predictability to evolution that would cause them to look like us.”



Darwin came up with the theory of evolution.

Aliens on screen

From strange blobs to spooky antennae, aliens in films come in all shapes and sizes.



Explorers

Three schoolboys build a spaceship in their garden and blast off to explore the universe. They meet two green-skinned aliens with weird antennae who are obsessed with Earth culture.



Home

Boov, a species of aliens with purple skin, try to take over planet Earth while they are on the run from their enemy, the Gorg. The Boov can change the colour of their skin when they feel extreme emotion.



E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial

When an alien becomes stranded on Earth, a young boy called Elliot tries to help it get home. E.T. has a big head on a long neck and is able to move objects with his mind.