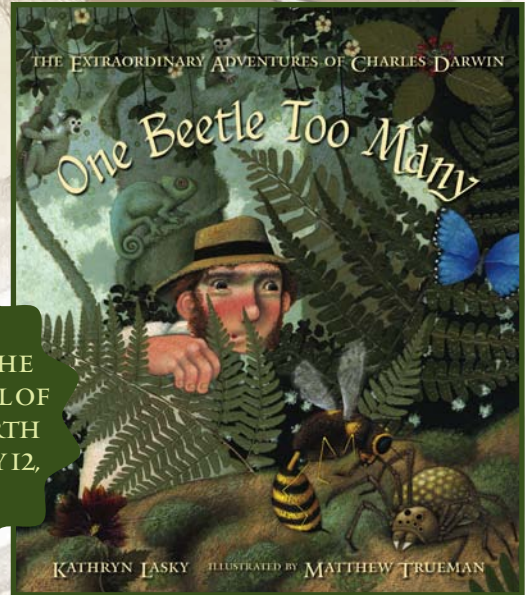


A CONVERSATION WITH  
**KATHRYN LASKY**  
AUTHOR OF  
**One Beetle Too Many**  
The Extraordinary Adventures  
of Charles Darwin

CELEBRATE THE  
BICENTENNIAL OF  
DARWIN'S BIRTH  
ON FEBRUARY 12,  
2009!



ISBN: 978-0-7636-1436-2  
\$17.99 (\$20.00 CAN) • Ages 7-12  
CANDLEWICK PRESS  
ON SALE JANUARY 13, 2009

**How did you become interested in Darwin, and what made you choose him as the subject of a picture book?**

I found Darwin a daring man, and yet he was very shy; he was curious but somewhat withdrawn. The combination of these seemingly conflicting personality traits intrigued me. But what really fascinated me was his passion for truth, which led him to explore one simple truth: that nothing living has remained the same or looks the way it has always looked. Species are not fixed and immutable. Species were not created all at once, forever and always, but have been evolving and changing over immense periods of time. So dogs have not always been dogs, nor have birds always been birds or roses roses, and most astounding to everyone and upsetting to many was the notion that humans have not always been humans. Allied species, or related plants or animals, descended from a common stock. They shared an ancestor long, long ago. This arguably has to be one of the most compelling mysteries in natural science, and I wanted to write about the man who figured it out.

**How did you go about researching the book?**

I read all that I could. I audited classes at Harvard, which is near my house in Cambridge, given by some famous evolutionary biologists such as the late Stephen Jay Gould and paleoanthropologists such as David Pilbeam. I even attended the lab sessions to look at bones and tried to understand the similarities and differences between early hominid skulls and primate skulls. I took a course in primatology.

**The book explains Darwin's theory of evolution and the debate between creationism and evolution very clearly. Was it difficult to condense these complex topics into the story and style of a picture book?**

Oh, yes! I had done a book some years before called *Traces of Life: The Origins of Humankind*, which explored these questions, so you could say I've had some practice condensing these subjects.

### What did you enjoy most about writing the book?

Darwin himself! The largeness of his imagination. Charles Darwin is a wonderful subject for children—a gentle rebel. As a youngster, he was considered something of a slow learner, not nearly as quick as his younger sister, who learned how to read before he did. He was an indifferent student and infinitely distractible. His father wanted him to be a clergyman, but he preferred chasing butterflies and collecting beetles—the work of a naturalist, not a man of the cloth. He was also a real cutup at the university—preferring sports, cards, and carousing to studies. I think kids can relate to this kind of undisciplined energy and enthusiasm for life.

As a scientist, Darwin was bold but shy, meticulous but capable of incredible intuitive leaps, and his imagination was limitless. He was working years and years before anyone had ever heard the word *gene*—genes had not yet been discovered, and it was only toward the end of Mendel's life that he began his experiments with peas and to systematically investigate inheritance characteristics.

In many ways, I see this book as a celebration of a human imagination. The role of imagination in science is greatly underrated, and this is not to undercut the authority of science or to say that imagination is at odds with valid methods of scientific inquiry. It merely is an acknowledgment that it takes a lot of imagination just to observe, begin to gain insight, and hypothesize. Darwin had it all, including the doggedness to study a subject like barnacles for nearly a decade. This was a tedious job that led him to remark, "I hate a Barnacle as no man ever did before, not even a sailor on a slow moving ship." But he studied them, as he did so many of the organisms he collected or grew, to see how a tiny barnacle he found on his voyage compared to others, to discover the relationships between various kinds and classes of barnacles.

### What do you hope kids will take away from this book?

An enthusiasm for life and certainly a less rigid view of how things supposedly "have to be." You can believe in God and you can believe in evolution. They are not mutually exclusive. If you read the famous last page of Darwin's *Origin of the Species*, you will find a man who believes in God, a creator:

*It is interesting to contemplate a tangled bank, clothed with many plants of many kinds, with birds singing on the bushes, with various insects flitting about, and with worms crawling through the damp earth, and to reflect that these elaborately constructed forms, so different from each other, and dependent upon each other in so complex a manner, have all been produced by laws acting around us. These laws, taken in the largest sense, being Growth with reproduction; Inheritance which is almost implied by reproduction; Variability from the indirect and direct action of the conditions of life, and from use and disuse; a Ratio of Increase so high as to lead to a Struggle for Life, and as a consequence to Natural Selection, entailing Divergence of Character and the Extinction of less improved forms. Thus, from the war of nature, from famine and death, the most exalted object which we are capable of conceiving, namely, the production of the higher animals, directly follows. There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed by the Creator into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone circling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being evolved.*

There is nothing scary about evolution. It's grand. It's wonderful, and we should be thrilled and proud to be part of such an ancient story.



**KATHRYN LASKY** is the award-winning author of more than ninety books for children, including *John Muir: America's First Environmentalist*; *A Voice of Her Own: The Story of Phillis Wheatley, Slave Poet*; *Vision of Beauty: The Story of Sarah Breedlove Walker*; and *An Interrupted Journey: Saving Endangered Sea Turtles*. She lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

