

# THE EUREKA! MOMENT



*Charles Darwin and*  
**EVOLUTION**







# Chapter 3

## 1835



**O**n 7th September, 1835, the *Beagle* left the coast of South America and sailed west into the open ocean. Eight days and 600 miles later we spotted land. It was Chatham Island, the most eastern of the Galapagos Islands. We were to spend a month amongst these islands while the crew on the *Beagle* mapped their coasts and the surrounding waters. Although these islands were tiny in size, their importance would later prove to be enormous.

I was troubled by not being able to make sense of the birds I had collected on the Galapagos Islands. I gave them to John Gould, a bird expert at the Zoological Society and said to him, "I am at a loss to know what to make of these little creatures. They appear to me to be different kinds of blackbirds, finches, gross-beaks and wrens. I think they are of little importance, but make of them what you will. If anyone can untangle their mystery, you can."

A few days later, I returned to the society to hear what Gould thought. I was astonished when he said, "All the birds are ground finches which are so odd that they form an entirely new group of twelve species."

Instantly, I realised their great importance to my work and I regretted not labelling them with which islands they had come from. Others on the *Beagle*, including Captain FitzRoy, had also collected birds on the islands and luckily they had

## Evolution before Darwin

The first person to develop a scientific theory of evolution was a French naturalist called Jean-Baptiste Lamarck (1744–1829). He thought living creatures continually came into existence from non-living matter and evolved into more and more complex creatures. He thought that creatures changed their behaviour to suit their environment and that these changes in behaviour physically changed the creatures. He also thought that these physical changes that happened in a single lifetime were passed on from one generation to another.