

“Evolution” of Finch Beaks—Again

Georgia Purdom, Ph.D., Answers in Genesis

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According to an ABC News article¹ reporting on the July 14th issue of *Science* magazine,² the beaks of Darwin’s finches in the Galapagos Islands have “evolved” yet again. Peter and Rosemary Grant, who have done extensive research on the birds for many years, have found that the medium ground finch now has a smaller beak. They observed that this occurred in a very short timeframe.

Defining Terms

The tagline to the news article states: “Finches Named for Charles Darwin on Galapagos Islands *Confirming His Theory of Evolution*” (italics added).³ Is this really evolution? Certainly not the molecules-to-man evolution Darwin promoted. The author later quotes a geneticist from the Smithsonian saying, “This was certainly a documented case of microevolution.”⁴ Exactly! Although we don’t endorse using the phrases macro/microevolution, we would agree that this is a small-scale change allowing an organism to adapt to its environment (which is what is meant by the author’s use of microevolution). This idea is even further refined by the Grants in the *Science* article as character displacement, which is adaptation resulting from competition with another species for limited food resources.⁵ This very accurately describes what is occurring; however, this small-scale variation within a kind is being misrepresented (as always!) as proof for Darwinian evolution from one kind to another.

Character Displacement and the Finches

According to the *Science* article,⁶ in 1977 beak size in the medium ground finch (*Geospiza fortis*) began to increase due to a drought which lessened the availability of small seeds as a food source. Only the finches with large beaks could break open the large seeds and survive. At that time, *G. fortis* had no competition for the large seeds. Then in 1982, the large ground finch (*G. magnirostris*) settled on the same island and because of its large beak size competed with *G. fortis* for the large seeds. This still was not enough to change the beak size of *G. fortis*. In 2003 and 2004, drought conditions caused the food supply to decrease, resulting in the death of a large number of *G. magnirostris* and *G. fortis* with large beaks. *G. magnirostris* seemed less able to deal with the drought as its beak size did not change. Possibly it had lost the genetic information to make a smaller beak. *G. fortis* apparently still had this genetic information and its beak size has declined since the drought, making it better able to compete for the food sources available. (Although this seems contradictory to what occurred in 1977 when the beak size became larger in response to the drought, the Grants do not have an explanation.)

The Grants were surprised at how rapidly the change in beak size had occurred. Many have extrapolated finch adaptation as evidence that molecules-to-man evolution can occur rapidly. Once again, it’s about defining the word evolution. As creationists, we fully accept the fact that adaptation/natural selection can occur rapidly. In fact, such processes (and perhaps other genetic factors) would have occurred rapidly after the Flood, producing variation within the animal kinds. Such effects are largely responsible for generating the tremendous diversity seen in the living world.⁷ In addition, as seen with *G. magnirostris*, natural selection leads to a decrease in genetic information and only those with already-present greater genetic variety, such as *G. fortis*, can adapt to their environment.^{8,9}

Nothing New Under the Sun

A professor of biology said this about the finch findings: “It will make its way instantly into general biology textbooks.”¹⁰ It’s already there! It is commonly purported as an “Icon of Evolution.” “Icon of Adaptation” or “Icon of Natural Selection” would be more appropriate terminology. The Grants’ research over many years has shown that beak size in finches varies according to many factors—increasing and decreasing over time. It is not directional in any sense, which would be required for molecules-to-man evolution. Adaptation/natural selection has been hijacked and wrongly used by evolutionists as the underlying mechanism of evolution. Rather, it is a mechanism that allows organisms to adapt to their environment in a fallen world.

Footnotes

1. ABC News. Finches named for Darwin are evolving, July 13, 2006.
2. Grant, P. and R. Grant, 2006. Evolution of character displacement in Darwins' finches. *Science* **313**:224–226.
3. ABC News, Ref. 1.
4. ABC News, Ref. 1.
5. Grant and Grant, Ref. 2.
6. Grant and Grant, Ref. 2.
7. Wieland, C., 1992. Darwin's finches. *Creation* **14**(3):22–23.
8. Muddy waters.
9. Patterson, R., 2007. Natural selection vs. evolution. *Evolution exposed*.
10. *Nature news*. Evolution caught in the act, July 13, 2006.

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