

The Kiwi's Egg – Charles Darwin and Natural Selection  
by David Quammen.  
Weidenfeld and Nicolson 2007.

I have read many books about Charles Darwin because he is a hero of mine, but I have read none as engaging, informative and skilful as David Quammen's latest publication.

Quammen writes as a non-scientist passionate about science, and as such he communicates scientific ideas in language that lay people can readily understand. His books are uniformly excellent, and he has made a world deprived of the luminous presence of Stephen Jay Gould a little easier to bear.

The Kiwi's Egg is part biography – Darwin's life was most unusual for a wide range of reasons – part treatise on the theory of natural selection that Darwin enunciated and the subsequent debate that has taken place concerning it, and continues ever more fiercely due to the absurdity of creationists and so called 'intelligent' designers, and part treatise on the extraordinary scientific advances of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that have transformed our world.

The title is derived from the fact that the Kiwi, New Zealand's national bird, lays an egg that is one fifth of her body weight and which, while inside her, occupies a huge amount of her body space. Darwin nurtured his theory of natural selection, aware of its massive implications, for many years before the possibility of another scholar publishing first on the same theme spurred him into print. During this time it was his pre-eminent, though not sole obsession. Hence the analogy, and an excellent one it is too.

Readers interested in evolutionary theory in general and Darwin in particular have no paucity of books to choose from, but as an introduction to the subject The Kiwi's Egg cannot be bettered.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh