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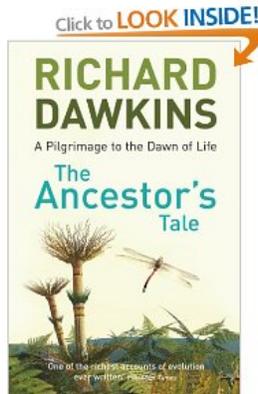
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Richard Dawkins (Author)

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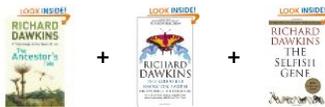
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Product Description

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Just as we trace our personal family trees from parents to grandparents and so on back in time, so in *The Ancestor's Tale* Richard Dawkins traces the ancestry of life. As he is at pains to point out, this is very much our human tale, our ancestry. Surprisingly, it is one that many otherwise literate people are largely unaware of. Hopefully Dawkins's name and well deserved reputation as a best selling writer will introduce them to this wonderful saga.

The Ancestor's Tale takes us from our immediate human ancestors back through what he calls 'concestors,' those shared with the apes, monkeys and other mammals and other vertebrates and beyond to the dim and distant microbial beginnings of life some 4 billion years ago. It is a remarkable story which is still very much in the process of being uncovered. And, of course from a scientist of Dawkins stature and reputation we get an insider's knowledge of the most up-to-date science and many of those involved in the research. And, as we have come to expect of Dawkins, it is told with a passionate commitment to scientific veracity and a nose for a good story. Dawkins's knowledge of the vast and wonderful sweep of life's diversity is admirable. Not only does it encompass the most interesting living representatives of so many groups of organisms but also the important and informative fossil ones, many of which have only been found in recent years.

Dawkins sees his journey with its reverse chronology as 'cast in the form of an epic pilgrimage from the present to the past [and] all roads lead to the origin of life.' It is, to my mind, a sensible and perfectly acceptable approach although some might complain about going against the grain of evolution. The great benefit for the general reader is that it begins with the more familiar present and the animals nearest and dearest to us—our immediate human ancestors. And then it delves back into the more remote and less familiar past with its droves of lesser known and extinct fossil forms. The whole pilgrimage is divided into 40 tales, each based around a group of organisms and discusses their role in the overall story. Genetic, morphological and fossil evidence is all taken into account and illustrated with a wealth of photos and drawings of living and fossils forms, evolutionary and distributional charts and maps through time, providing a visual compliment and complement to the text. The design also allows Dawkins to make numerous running comments and characteristic asides. There are also numerous references and a good index.--
Douglas Palmer --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Review

'...Dawkins is unequalled in his ability to express complex ideas in layman's terms without sounding patronising.' (Simon Shaw *MAIL ON SUNDAY*)

'more readable than almost anyone else, a master of liquid-clear prose and revelatory pearls of insight.' (David Smith *THE OBSERVER*)

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Life explained., 10 May 2006By [Kevin Roche](#) (UK) - [See all my reviews](#)**This review is from: The Ancestor's Tale (Paperback)**

This pilgrimage through 3 billion years of life on earth is one of the most amazing books I have ever read on the subject of evolution. Starting with us, Dawkins takes us on a journey back through time meeting up with our increasingly distant common ancestors (concestors) along the way until we get back to the beginnings of life itself, a point in time that is marked by the first steps along the molecular road of heredity. Each chapter has a tale to tell about the process of scientific discovery, of the wonder of evolution, told through the example of a particular member of the latest pilgrims to join.

There is so much information in this book that every day I was reading it I'd find some nugget to relate to my wife and children: how did we learn to walk bipedally; why are we hairless and drink milk; what do platypuses use their bills for; how are animal bodies segmented; what did the first vertebrate look like; what have whales and hippos got in common. Why we know what we know through phylogenetic, taxonomic, molecular and fossil data is explained fully in the chapters that deal with our meeting with each successive concestor, but Dawkins is also careful to note where there are gaps in our knowledge and offers possibilities for their solution.

This book is truly impressive.

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A tour de force on the evolution of life, 17 Oct 2006By [John Grint](#) (Sevenoaks, UK) - [See all my reviews](#)**This review is from: The Ancestor's Tale (Paperback)**

Wow! If you are looking for a masterclass on the evolution of life on earth, look no further. This magnificent, weighty tome is science as high art. Packed with comprehensive scientific detail and discovery, and hugely impressive in its scale, it is nevertheless written in a highly accessible style. Don't be put off by the size of the book! Step-by-step, Dawkins takes us back through history: from the development of modern man, through the families of primates and mammals, stopping off to explore the worlds of reptiles and insects, right back to the earliest bacteria and to the origins of life itself. A series of "Tales", illustrated by particular species, brings the science vividly to life and illuminates the path as we seek out our common ancestors.

This book is a "must read" for a modern understanding of evolutionary theory.

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Fasinating book, a scientific author of rare lucidity., 27 Dec 2004By [Hugh Ellison](#) - [See all my reviews](#)**This review is from: The Ancestor's Tale: A Pilgrimage to the Dawn of Life (Hardcover)**

I have read most of Dawkins's previous books, "The Selfish Gene", "The Extended Phenotype" and "Climbing Mount Improbable" plus others. He is a scientific author of rare lucidity, explaining complex subjects using simple metaphors and crystal clear explanations. I can say without doubt that he, along with Matt Ridley, have changed my world view.

Some popular science books require multiple readings of each paragraph to fully understand the book, (a certain wheelchair bound genius springs to mind!), or spread the facts/info out over agonisingly long chapters. (Horizon!) This is not the case with Mr Dawkins whose pace is almost perfect.

This is not to say that he avoids complex subjects, far from it, this book contains the most use of technical biological terms so far, giving examples of each species encountered in our journey from each ancestral meeting point and explaining how they worked out the ancestral tree.

He always explains the terms/concepts prior to using them, and continues to use metaphors whilst using the term to remind us of its meaning.

The final chapter gives theories of the origins of life.

The book showcases each of our mutual co-ancestors, ie the ancestor of Humans and chimpanzees, then they join our pilgrimage back to the next co-ancestor. Until all life joins the final

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