Dear Mr Darwin,

We received the fossil specimens that you collected on your recent expedition to Argentina, aboard the HMS Beagle. I must admit to being jealous of your voyage, I would have liked to experience the area myself. The notes you sent with the fossils record them as specimens of rhinoceroses and mastodons, an understandable conclusion given their huge size. I write today with some exciting findings, it seems that these specimens are more closely related to armadillos, sloths and anteaters - giant versions of them!

It would seem these species are now extinct and their habitats replaced with other animals. I wonder what caused them to die out?

Yours Sincerely,

Richard Owen

Anatomist, Royal College of Surgeons

Dear Mr Darwin,

It was wonderful to have you visit our zoo this past week and I very much enjoyed listening to you speak about the animals you encountered on your voyage. I hope to be able to show some of the species that you described to me in zoo exhibits in the future. I particularly enjoyed our conversation outside the orangutan exhibit, and have since found myself watching the human-like behaviours that you pointed out with a deeper interest.

I wondered how you thought these behaviours might have arisen? I intend to find out if they show these behaviours in the wild.

Yours sincerely,

Humphrey Davy

London Zoological Society

Dear Mr Darwin,

It is with great interest that I read your notes on the geological changes you observed on your travels. The earthquake you experienced in Chili provided evidence that the land changes, just as I had suspected. Before the earthquake, mussel beds were beneath the tide. But as you surveyed the land once the quake had settled, you saw those mussel beds were now above the tide - you observed that the land had risen!

Your evidence raises a lot of questions. These small changes in the land seem to have accumulated over time, it must have taken eons to form the earth we see today. Maybe the earth is older than we think?

Best wishes,

Charles Lyell

Geological Society

Dear Mr Darwin,

It is with much excitement that I write to you today. I have been studying with great interest the bird specimens that you collected from the Galapagos Islands. What a wonderous place it must have been.

You detailed differences in the mockingbirds you observed, and how the birds seemed to differ in their adaptations between islands. In fact, these are three separate species of mockingbirds, each one a little different from the other.

You also sent some bird specimens which you labelled as wrens, finches and a few unknown. Some of these birds are quite differently adapted, particularly in their beak shape. I am confident that every one of the 14 birds seem to be a different species of the ground finch. How exciting to see such variations between them!

Could you please tell me more about the differences between the island environments? I am curious to understand why the birds on each island differ so.

John Gould

Ornithologist, Zoological Society

Dear Mr Darwin,

You wrote to me about the domestic dogs that we breed. You were interested in how we have managed to breed dogs that are happy to live in the home, and have such a variety of desirable characteristics. I write to invite you to visit us and see some of the animals for yourself, but I shall briefly explain here.

We look for small variations between the dogs in the characteristic we want, for example we may favour smaller dogs that take up less room in the home, or dogs with shorter fur, or those with a calmer temperament. In the first example, we would breed together our smallest dogs, and the offspring (puppies) that they have will probably be smaller too. We would then pick the smallest from those litters and breed them. Over many generations we can breed much smaller dogs than the population we started with, because we have only allowed the smallest to breed.

I hope this information helps you with your studies.

Kind regards,

George Smith

UK Kennel Club