

The Text: *On The Origin of Species* by Charles Darwin

Excerpt from Chapter IV: Natural Selection

1.1 ***Illustrations of the action of Natural Selection***

1.2 In order to make it clear how, as I believe, natural selection acts, I must beg permission
1.3 to give one or two imaginary illustrations. Let us take the case of the wolf, which preys on
1.4 various animals, securing some by craft, some by strength, and some by fleetness; and let
1.5 us suppose that the fleetest prey, a deer for instance, had from any change in the country
1.6 increased in numbers, or that other prey had decreased in numbers, during that season of
1.7 the year when the wolf is hardest pressed for food. I can under such circumstances see no
1.8 reason to doubt that the swiftest and slimmest wolves would have the best chance of
1.9 surviving, and so be preserved or selected, -provided always that they retained strength to
1.10 master their prey at this or at some other period of the year, when they might be compelled
1.11 to prey on other animals. I can see no more reason to doubt this, than that man can
1.12 improve the fleetness of his greyhounds by careful and methodical selection, or by that
1.13 unconscious selection which results from each man trying to keep the best dogs without
1.14 any thought of modifying the breed.

*moving swiftly or
rapidly/ nimble*

*done carefully
through and
organized set of
procedures*

2.1 Even without any change in the proportional numbers of the animals on which our
2.2 wolf preyed, a cub might be born with an innate tendency to pursue certain kinds of prey.
2.3 Nor can this be thought very improbable for we often observe great differences in the
2.4 natural tendencies of our domestic animals; one cat, for instance, taking to catch rats,
2.5 another mice; hares or rabbits, and another hunting on marshy ground and almost nightly
2.6 catching woodcocks or snipes. The tendency to catch rats rather than mice is known to be
2.7 inherited. Now, if any slight innate change of habit or of structure benefitted an individual
2.8 wolf, it would have the best chance of surviving and of leaving offspring. Some of its young
2.9 would probably inherit the same habits or structure, and by the repetition of this process, a
2.10 new variety might be formed which would either supplant or coexist with the parent-form
2.11 wolf. Or, again, the wolves inhabiting a mountainous district, and those frequenting the
2.12 lowlands, would naturally be forced to hunt different prey; and from the continued
2.13 preservation of the individuals best fitted for the two sites, two varieties might slowly be
2.14 formed.

inborn/ natural

*to live in peace
with each other*