

2003 letter asking for Darwin Day to be made a national holiday

In February 2003, over 40 distinguished supporters of the BHA – academics, philosophers, scientists and writers – called for a new public holiday on 12 February to celebrate the birth of Charles Darwin.

The letter below, organised by the British Humanist Association, was sent to the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary as well as to *The Times*, where it was published on 12 February with half a dozen signatures selected by *The Times*: Simon Blackburn, Francis Crick, Richard Dawkins, Richard Doll, Philip Pullman, and Claire Rayner. It provoked some lively and positive responses, both on *The Times* letters page and to the BHA.

The letter

We, the undersigned, support proposals for the creation of a new public holiday, Darwin Day, on February 12th. This is the birthday of Charles Darwin, one of the greatest British scientists and thinkers that ever lived. At a time when creationism appears to be gaining ground in English schools, the public celebration of Charles Darwin's contribution to modern science could send out a clear message of support for scientific thinking.

It will be the 200th anniversary of his birth in 2009, and we very much hope that this new public holiday will be in place by then.

Yours sincerely

Hanne Stinson (BHA Executive Director)
Jane Asher
Professor Simon Blackburn
Sir Tom Blundell, FRS
Sir Hermann Bondi, FRS
Alan Brownjohn
Sir Roy Calne, FRS
Dr Malcolm Cass
Michael Clark
Sir Kenneth Clucas
Michael Connarty MP
Professor Sir Bernard Crick
Professor Francis Crick, FRS
Dr Helena Cronin
Professor Richard Dawkins (BHA Vice-President)
Sir Richard Doll, CH, FRS
Lord Dormand of Easington (BHA Vice-President)
Professor Robin Dunbar, FBA
Michael Foot
Dr Steven French
Professor John Harper, FRS
Professor Hugh Huxley, MBE, FRS
Professor Steve Jones
Sir Ludovic Kennedy
Professor Sir Hans Kornberg, FRS
Dr Brendan Larvor
Dr Stephen Law
Professor John Maynard Smith, FRS
Professor David Papineau
Sir Roger Penrose, FRS
Philip Pullman
Dr Janet Radcliffe Richards
Claire Rayner, OBE (BHA President)
Jonathan Rée

Dr Ben Rogers
Professor Sir Joseph Rotblat, FRS
Professor Peter Simons
Sir David Smith, FRS
Professor Sir Kenneth Stuart, FRS
Polly Toynbee
Professor Sir David Weatherall, FRS
Dr Nigel Warburton
Professor Lewis Wolpert, CBE, FRS (BHA Vice-President)