

# DESERET NEWS

## How Darwin Day has evolved in the U.S.

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Charles Darwin's statue in Shrewsbury

It's Darwin Day — the 207th anniversary of the birth of scientist Charles Darwin, marked worldwide by hundreds of events, many of which are detailed at the American Humanist Association's [International Darwin Day website](#).

This year, celebrations include lectures, birthday parties and dinners where guests can partake of "primordial soup." There is also an annual, week-long Darwin festival in Salem, Massachusetts, that has been operating since 1980 and is one of the first known organized celebrations, according to [the International Darwin Day Foundation](#). The [AHA](#) began its events in 1995 and now manages the Darwin Day website.

Entwined in the history of Darwin Day is the struggle between the creationist movement and evolutionary scientists over what is taught in schools. A timeline published in The [News Journal](#) in Wilmington, Delaware, includes two Supreme Court cases about the constitutionality of teaching creationism in public schools — *Edwards v. Aguillar* in 1987 and *Kitzmiller v. Dover* in 2005 — in its coverage of Darwin's legacy and the history of Darwin Day.

[Religion News Service](#) outlines current efforts at legislation to permit the teaching of "alternatives" to evolution in several states, including Tennessee, Oklahoma and Iowa.

"Anti-evolutionists now speak of 'Science Education Acts' and 'academic freedom,' with no mention of a creator or designer" in an effort to avoid the impression of religious motivation, according to RNS.

Not all Americans celebrate Darwin Day. The [Pew Research Center](#)'s recent Religious Landscape Study found that roughly two-thirds (62 percent) of Americans say humans have evolved over time, and just half of those (33 percent of all Americans) say they have evolved due only to natural processes (i.e., without the help of a divine hand) — meaning that just a third of Americans fully accept evolution through natural selection.

According to the survey, evangelical Protestants, Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons are most likely to reject evolution outright, while Jews, Buddhists, Hindus and the unaffiliated are most likely to believe in evolution due to natural processes.

RNS also interviewed Cowboy Bob Sorenson, the founder of [Question Evolution Day](#), a response to Darwin Day also celebrated on Feb. 12 since 2012.

“We want to see critical thinking — not criticism as in shaking your finger at us for what we believe, but to look at things objectively and analyze the flaws of evolution,” Sorenson wrote in an email to RNS.

Others take a middle path, according to RNS, such as the religious leaders behind the [Clergy Letter Project](#), who promote the idea that evolution and religion can coexist. They also plan events, sermons and discussions around Darwin Day.

“It is important for parishioners to realize that some of the very loudest voices arguing evolution is an abomination and bad science are speaking loudly but narrowly for their own religion but not for other religions,” Michael Zimmerman, founder of the Clergy Letter Project and a biologist at Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington, told RNS. “In fact, those voices are doing damage to religion in general as well as to science.”

Twitter users also got in on #DarwinDay, posting [memes](#) of Darwin, [links to letters](#) from Darwin's archives, and an original 1860 review of "The Origin of Species" from the [Atlantic](#).