

**Somerville College  
Biology  
Michaelmas Term 2026  
1<sup>st</sup> year reading list.**

**Compulsory**

**Charles Darwin (1859) *The Origin of Species* 1<sup>st</sup> Edition**

You **must** read this book because the first tutorial is based on the contents. In that tutorial you will have to describe the ten most compelling pieces of evidence that support Darwin's theory. Please do not assume that because this book was written over 165 years ago that it is no longer central to our understanding of how life evolves. You will need to read this in silence to enjoy the prose and to understand it properly. The 1<sup>st</sup> edition is the best one to start with, but do not worry if you use the book by James Costa (*see below*).

"The Annotated Origin" annotated by James T. Costa is also an excellent edition of this published by The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press ISBN 978-0-674-06017-3

**Further Suggestions**

Reading any of these books would be very profitable (& enjoyable) use of your time but please do not think that you must:

- Nick Lane (2016) *The Vital Question*
- Jonathan Losos (2017) *Improbable Destinies: How Predictable is Evolution?*
- Merlin Sheldrake (2020) *Entangled Life*
- Tom Higham (2021) *The World before Us*
- Dave Goulson (2021) *Silent Earth: averting the insect apocalypse.*
- Seirian Sumner (2022) *Endless Forms: the secret world of wasps.*
- Lindsay Turnbull (2023) *Biology – the whole story*
- Peter Frankopan (2023) *The Earth Transformed: an untold story*

VERY SHORT INTRODUCTIONS (VSI) published by Oxford University Press

- *Animal Kingdom* by Peter Holland
- *Plants* by Timothy Walker
- *Fungi* by Nicholas P Money
- *Anthropocene* by Erle C. Ellis

You will **not** have time to read all of these, but they are suggestions not only from the teaching staff but also from past students.

We look forward to welcoming you to Somerville in October. We can be contacted on this email if you have any questions before you arrive: [timothy.walker@some.ox.ac.uk](mailto:timothy.walker@some.ox.ac.uk)

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