

Humboldt and Darwin

To the Editor:

Colin Thubron, in [his review](#) of Andrea Wulf's "The Invention of Nature: Alexander von Humboldt's New World" (Sept. 27), quotes Charles Darwin's reference to Humboldt as the "greatest scientific traveler who ever lived." However, Humboldt's influence on Darwin's work was much more than usually recognized. Humboldt's travel accounts about the American continent inspired Darwin's travel around the world on board the Beagle, and on that voyage Darwin carried with him a copy of Humboldt's work. Darwin's narrative, as well as those of many other 19th-century scientific explorers, was deeply influenced by Humboldt's style.

Further, Humboldt's observations on the distribution of plants and animals, as well as his belief that humans all around the world belong to the same species, had an important influence on Darwin's own views regarding natural selection and human evolution in general. No wonder Darwin cited Humboldt more than 400 times in his writings.

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