Erratum

There is a mistake and a possible misrepresentation in the article 'The Origin of Species after 150 Years' (*Resonance,* Vol. 14, pp.124–153, February 2009) as originally printed.

The mistake occurs in two places on page 130. The legend to *Figure* 1 refers to "…the Galápagos islands, where Darwin found the famous finches that showed evidence of speciation at work". On the same page, the text contains the words "Doubts about the fixity of species surfaced when he learnt from the ornithologist John Gould that the roughly similar-looking finches he had collected from the Galápagos Islands belonged to distinct species…". The implication is that (as is generally believed) the diverse forms of the finches and the manner in which they were distributed on different islands in the Galápagos group first alerted Darwin to the possibility that species were not unchanging entities after all.

The role of the finches as exemplars of speciation and adaptive radiation is well-deserved. But it was established only in the middle of the 20th century. Galápagos birds and John Gould did provide an important stimulus to Darwin's thinking about the nature of species. However, the birds in question were the less well-known mockingbirds, not the famous finches. Jim Endersby pointed out to me that the story of the finches as given in the *Resonance* article has been effectively demolished by the historian of science Frank Sulloway (see F J Sulloway, "Darwin and His Finches: The Evolution of a Legend", *Journal of the History of Biology*, Vol.15, pp.1–53, 1982). It is unfortunate that it continues to persist in the literature.

According to Sulloway, the central problem that confronted scholars was the correct assignment of Darwin's finch specimens to specific islands of the Galápagos group. It was in the course of trying to tackle this problem that things went wrong. As the 'standard version' of the finch story began taking root, textbooks started to spread it among the general public. Indeed the myth became self-reinforcing, to the extent that labels pertaining to sites of collection were changed on museum specimens of finches. In other words, historical evidence was deliberately altered. This was done in good conscience: the legend of the finches had convinced people that the original evidence must have been recorded wrongly (in Sulloway's words: "A number of originally unlabeled Darwin specimens appear to have acquired island localities later in a completely circular fashion…").

A possible misrepresentation was noticed by Frits Staal. It has to do with the phrase "the Persian philosopher Ibn Sina" that occurs on page 136 in the context of Uniformitarianism. Ibn Sina was born in Bukhara (long a part of the Persian Empire and today in Uzbekistan) and died in Hamadan, which is in modern Iran. He wrote in Arabic, the language of international science. If one wants to identify him with a culture at all, it may be more appropriate to refer to him as an Arab philosopher.

I regret these oversights and express my thanks to Drs. Endersby and Staal for drawing my attention to them.

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Bangalore, 9 March 2009

(**NOTE:** The Web version of the article has been modified to incorporate these corrections.)