Astronomy 230

This class (Lecture 17):
Biological Evolution
Fred Knecht
William Kormos
Adam Molski

Next Class:

Origin of Intelligence
Kerry Doyle
Steven Novak

Oct 31:
Alan Francis
Katelyn Swartz
Octavio Mendoza

Music: *Center of Universe* – Mr. Children

HW #3

- **Jefferey Lipsey:** http://www.aliensthetruth.com//
- **Vlad Nicolaescu:** http://www.stopabductions.com/

Presentations

- **Fred Knecht**: Possibilities of Interstellar Travel
- **William Kormos**: Interplanetary Internet
- **Adam Molski**: Space Elevator

Outline

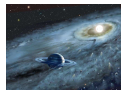
- Variation, particularly diversity, in Life from evolution.
- And sex
- Radioactive decay
- Early Life– making the atmosphere.
- Summary of life on Earth.

Drake Equation

Frank Drake

That's 2.6 life-arising systems/decade



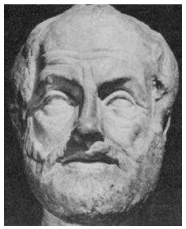





$$N = R_* \times f_p \times n_e \times f_l \times f_i \times f_c \times L$$

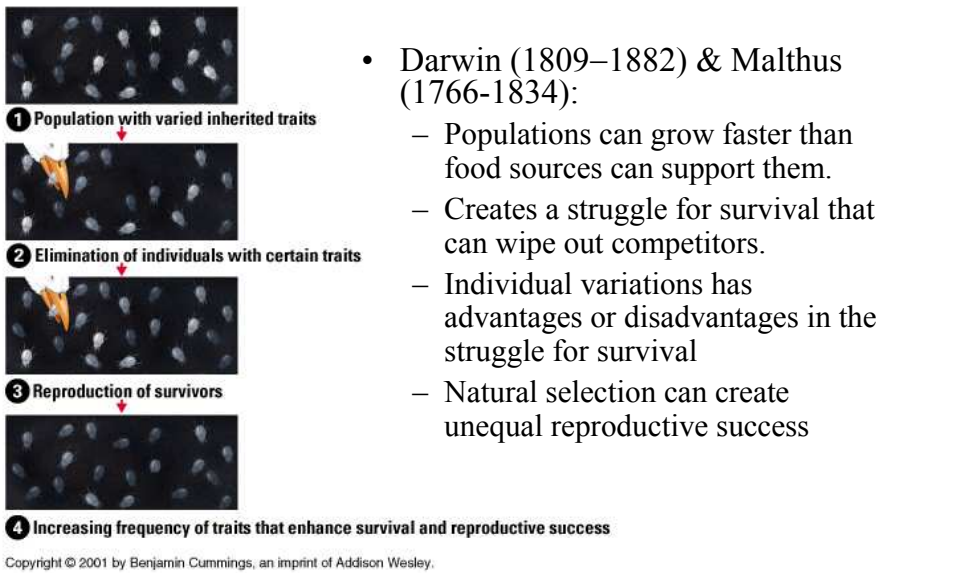
# of advanced civilizations we can contact in our Galaxy today	Star formation rate	Fraction of stars with planets	# of Earthlike planets per system	Fraction on which life arises	Fraction that evolve intelligence	Fraction that commun-icate	Lifetime of advanced civilizations
	15 stars/ yr	0.5 systems/ star	2.7 x 0.134 = 0.36 planets/ system	0.095 life/ planet	intel./ life	comm./ intel.	yrs/ comm.

Changes in Bio-Systems



- Today's view: evolution is the most important and unifying property of life.
- Anaximander (c. 610–547 BC): life arose in water and gradually became more complex
- Empedocles (c. 492–432 BC): survival of the fittest (but, "*a good idea stated within an insufficient theoretical frame loses its explanatory power and is forgotten*" by Hans Reichenbach)
- Aristotle (384–322 BC): species are fixed and independent of each other → evolution discarded for 2000 years
- Fossil record: slowly broke down the Aristotelian theory

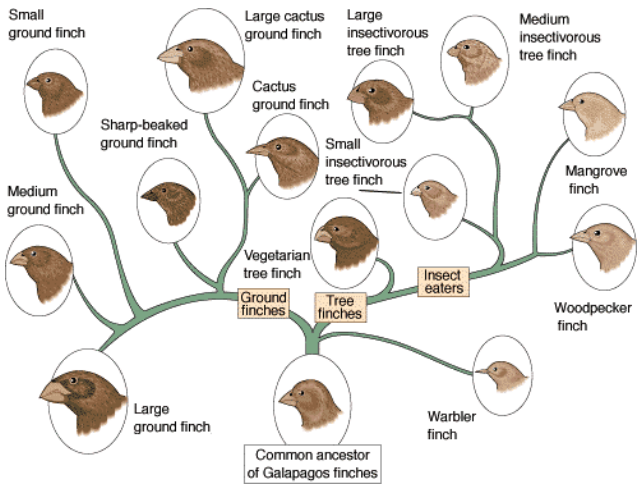
For the Species Survival



- Darwin (1809–1882) & Malthus (1766-1834):
  - Populations can grow faster than food sources can support them.
  - Creates a struggle for survival that can wipe out competitors.
  - Individual variations has advantages or disadvantages in the struggle for survival
  - Natural selection can create unequal reproductive success

Filling the Niche with Finch

- Other Evidence:
  - Adapted species in the Galápagos Islands, in particular finches
  - Artificial breeding of house/farm animals and vegetables
- DNA is really the mechanism of natural selection, but evolution requires both heredity and environment



Mutant Sex

- Mutations from changes in the bases of DNA.
- Usually copying errors, but also radiation– radioactivity, cosmic rays, chemical agents, or UV light.
- About 3 mutations per person per generation.
- Most mutations are neutral, changes in the *junk* DNA.
- Why is sex important to this class?

http://www.mutantx.net/features/press_vw_sexy.html

Mutant Sex

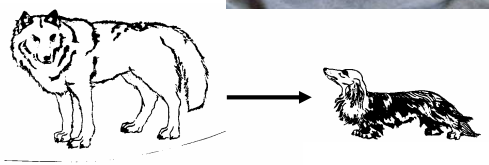
- Sexual reproduction leads to greater genetic diversity– a difference between prokaryotes and eukaryotes?
- Asexual reproduction does not allow 2 new and beneficial mutations to combine.
- Blackberries have not changed much in 10 millions years, but sexual plants have produced: raspberries, thimbleberries, cloudberries, dewberries, etc.
- Sex is useful in the process, but the mutations are still key.

http://www.alcasoft.com/arkansas/blackberry.html

Does it take a long time?

Cabbage, kale, kohlrabi, brussels sprouts, cauliflower and broccoli have same common ancestor– wild mustard. All bred by humans on a very short time scale.

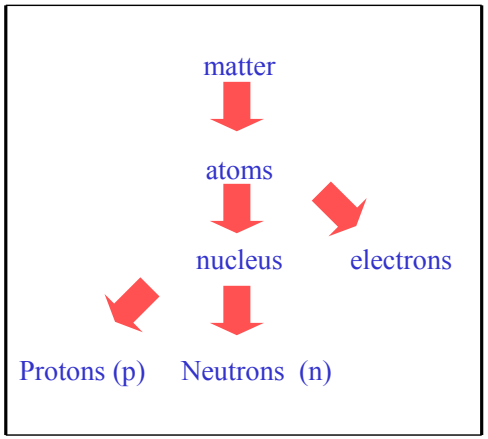
This is selective breeding, but still the potential is in the DNA.



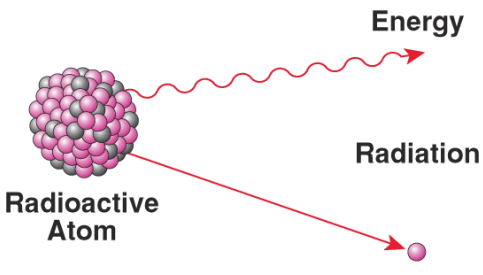
Or domestic lap dogs from wolves in about 5000 years.

Radioactive Dating

Recall:



- Most atomic nuclei stable
- But some nuclei are *unstable*,
  ⇒ *decay* to new nucleus
  "radioactive"



The Law of Radioactive Decay

As radioactive "parent" decays, the number of decay product or "daughters" increases

Decay is a good "clock"

- Each radioactive species has different "tick"
- Rate= "half-life"
- Exponential decay from original population of n_0

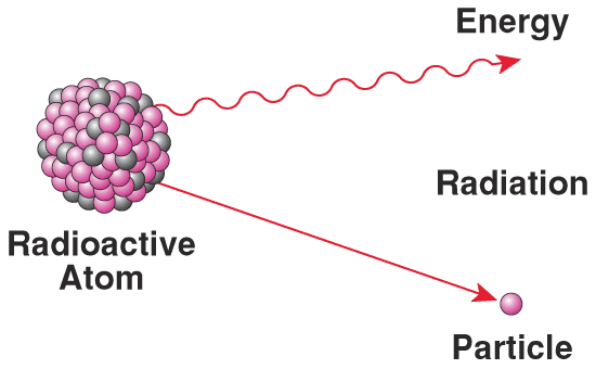
Decay Rule

Start out with N parents, 0 daughters

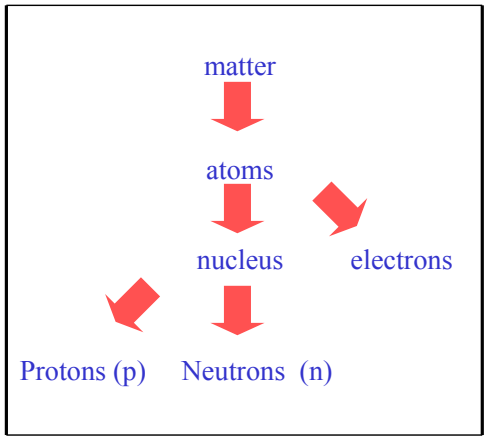
Time t since start	# parents	# daughters
0	N	0
$t_{1/2}$	½ N = half as much	½ N have appeared
$2t_{1/2}$	¼ N = half again as much	¾ N
$3t_{1/2}$	1/8 N	7/8 N
$30t_{1/2}$	About $N/10^9$	99.9999999% N

Radioactive Decay Examples

http://www.colorado.edu/physics/2000/isotopes/radioactive_decay3.html



Radioactive Dating



Example 1: Carbon C=6p

- Carbon-12: 6p+6n, stable
- Carbon-14: 6p + 8n, unstable (1/2 life of 5730 years)
- **$^{14}C \rightarrow {}^{14}N$ (nitrogen)**
- Nitrogen-14: 7p + 7n, stable

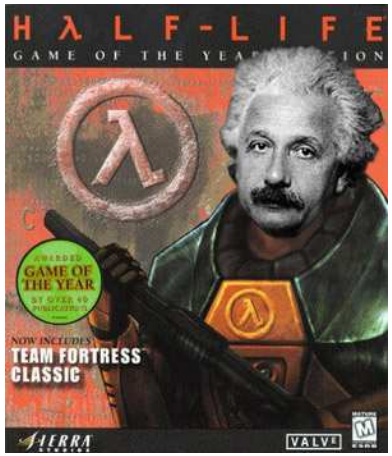
Example 2: Uranium U=92p

- Uranium-238: 92 p + 146 n (1/2 life of 4.5 billion years)

$^{238}U \rightarrow$ chain of decays $\rightarrow {}^{206}Pb$ (lead)

Carbon-14

- Cosmic rays from space are constantly hitting the Earth.
- React with ^{14}N in atmosphere to create ^{14}C.
- Decays back to ^{14}N with half life of 5730 years.
- But, there is an equilibrium in abundance
- In atmosphere, the ^{14}C is mostly in $^{14}CO^2$.



http://bbspot.com/Images/News_Features/2003/12/half-life.jpg

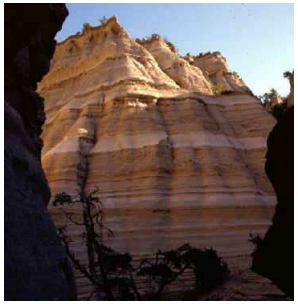
Carbon-14

- Plants take in $^{14}CO^2$ with the $^{12}CO^2$ and other animals eat the plants.
- So, every living creature has a equilibrium ratio of $^{14}CO^2/^{12}CO^2$.
- When the organism dies, the ^{14}C decays to ^{14}N. By measuring how much ^{14}C remains, you can date the fossil.
- This works well to about 60,000 years.
  - Viking remains in Newfoundland– 500 yrs before Columbus.
  - Shroud of Turin to 1330 AD

http://web.mit.edu/smcguire/www/newfoundland/newf16.html

Dating Rocks

- First you ask them out?
- No, you need a radioactive decay that has a longer half-life than ^{14}C.
- Potassium-argon
  - ^{40}K decays to ^{40}Ar with a 1200 Myr half-life.
- Uranium-lead
  - ^{235}U to ^{207}Pb with 700 Myr half-life.
- But these only work with volcanic layers.
- So, the ages of fossils are interpolated from ages of volcanic layers above and below them.



Era	*Period*	*Myr Ago*	*Life Forms*	*Events*
Cenozoic	Quaternary	2	H. Sapiens	Ice ages
	Tertiary	65	Primates	Extinction of Dinosaurs
Mesozoic	Cretaceous	136	Birds	S. Atlantic open to 1900 miles
	Jurassic	190		N. Atlantic open to 600 miles
	Triassic	225	Mammals	Continental drift
Paleozoic	Permian	280	Reptiles	Pangaea breaks up
	Carboniferous	345	Amphibians	Formation of coal
	Devonian	395	Insects	
	Silurian	430	Land Plants	
	Ordovician	500	Fish	
	Cambrian	543	Trilobites	
Precambrian		545	Small Shelly Fossils	
		580	Ediacarans	
		600-800	Multicellular life	Snowball Earth episodes

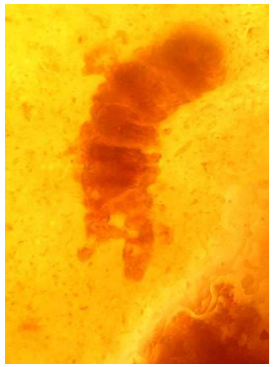
Increase of Complexity

- Last table showed only the last 800 Myrs.
- More complex and intelligent organisms appeared later on.
- For many years it was thought that life originated in the Cambrian era, then Precambrian fossils were found.
- Then, it was realized that there were single-celled fossils that required microscopes.

Myr Ago	*Era*	*Event*
Now	Cenozoic	
	Mesozoic	
	Paleozoic	Macroscopic life/Snowball Earth
	Precambrian	
1000		Worm tracks
		Multicellular algae
		Eukaryotes certain
		Sexual reproduction
2000		Eukaryotes possible
	Protozoic	Oxygen-rich atmosphere
		Snowball Earth
		Formation of continents
3000	Archean	Life begins?
4000		Formation of Oceans
		Bombardment decreases
		Frequent impacts
	Hadean	Earth formed

Concepts

- As prokaryotes are simpler than eukaryotes, we expect them to exist first.
- Identifying fossil prokaryotes is difficult: they're tiny!
- But there is enough evidence that before 1500-2000 Myrs ago there are only prokaryotes fossils.
- Note: the oldest fossils (3800 Myrs ago) are under some dispute, but the 2800 Myr old fossils are universally accepted.
- All of the macroscopic life only arose in the last 600 Myrs– 1/6th of the history of life on Earth.



http://www.earth.ox.ac.uk/research/geobiology/geobiology.htm

Making Oxygen!

- The early prokaryotes played a crucial role for life on Earth by producing oxygen through photosynthesis.
- Cyanobacteria (was called blue-green algae) changed the world!
- Lived in colonies that formed mats or films, growing into large structures called stromatolites.
- Still around, but much more common before 700 Myrs ago.

Making Oxygen!

- Oxygen was new and important step in intelligence
- It allowed a new energy extraction method
  - Aerobic (using oxygen) metabolism
  - More complex life.
  - Created ozone layer (dry land now an option for life on Earth).

Relationship to ETs

- Would evolution on other planets have a similar time-scale?
- Evolution is not a deterministic process.
- Selection seems to be mostly luck, rather than adaptation.
- On the other hand, many traits have developed in several lineages– warm blood and eyes.
- Some say that intelligence seems to increase in many lineages, so it is likely that if live exists then intelligent life exists.
- On the other hand, the plant kingdom never developed neurons.

Summary

- This following slides are from: http://www.udayton.edu/~INSS/
- Nice timeline of life on Earth.