

Darwinian mystery may have been solved

U.S. scientists may have solved Charles Darwin's "abominable mystery" of flowering plants' rapid evolution after they appeared 140 million years ago.

The researchers from the Floral Genome Project at Penn State University, with an international team of collaborators, developed new statistical methods to analyze incomplete DNA sequences from 13 strategically selected plant species.

The scientists say they uncovered a previously hidden "paleopolyploidy" event -- an ancient whole-genome duplication that preceded the appearance of the ancestral flowering plant.

"We found a concentration of duplicated genes that suggests a whole-genome duplication event in the earliest flowering plants," said Claude dePamphilis, associate professor of biology and senior author of the paper. "A polyploidy event early in the history of flowering plants could explain their sudden evolution."

The research is presented in the June issue of *Genome Research*.

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