



The Book of Life: An Illustrated History of the Evolution of Life on Earth (Second Edition)

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A new edition of the beautifully illustrated depiction of the dramatic story of survival and extinction.

The Book of Life uses an exemplary fusion of art and science to tell the story of life on earth. The text, under the editorship of Stephen Jay Gould, provides a thorough understanding of the latest research and is accompanied by paintings prepared especially for this book. Never before has our planet's evolution been so clearly, so ingeniously explained. History is marked by disaster. The Book of Life explains how mammals, having survived at least one of these disasters?the impact of a massive comet?luckily inherited the earth. Next came the rise of modern humans, who would shape the world as no creature has. As this fascinating history unfolds, gorgeous illustrations allow us to observe climate changes, tectonic plate movement, the spread of plant life, and the death of the dinosaurs. We discover the chains of animal survival, the causes and consequences of adaptation, and finally the environmental impact of human life. Color illustrations throughout.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

An unusual scientific reference work by any measure, *The Book of Life* opens with an unusual protest from its editor, Stephen Jay Gould, who worries that it may have left out much of importance discovered between the present and the book's original publication in 1993. Gould's worry is well placed--in the last few years, many advances have been made in taxonomy and genetics, to name just two areas. Still, the book is a lucid, readily comprehensible, and largely up-to-date overview of the origins and evolution of life on earth, from the emergence of bacteria 4 billion years ago to that of *Homo sapiens* in recent geological time. Written by distinguished scientists, the text proceeds chronologically, giving an in-depth account of the fossil record. It is matched by hundreds of paintings, drawings, charts, and graphs that reinforce the authors' discussions.

More than all that, *The Book of Life* is a manifesto proclaiming the essential correctness of evolutionary theory, which has come under fire in places like Afghanistan and Kansas. "Life has changed through time," paleontologist Michael Benton observes. "No other explanation will account for the sequence and variety of the life forms preserved as fossils, or the history recorded since humankind began to draw, paint, and carve, about 30,000 years ago." The book's careful documentation of those changes makes it a highly useful reference for high school and university students, and it's a book that rewards casual browsing as well. --

Gregory McNamee

From Library Journal

It is hard to know just what to make of this book. On one hand, the inclusion of dozens of striking color paintings and an introductory essay by Stephen Jay Gould on the history of iconography in the life sciences suggest a coffee-table book on biological illustration. On the other hand, the bulk of the illustrations, along with the organization of the text, suggest a textbook or encyclopedia aimed at high school students and general readers. Each of the six chapters--beginning with the origin of life in the seas, continuing through the age of dinosaurs, and ending with the evolution of the primates and hominids--is written by an expert in the field and addresses the latest research. Unfortunately, there are no bibliographies pointing readers to primary sources. This book will probably see the most use in the reference collection of public and school libraries.

- *Eric Hinsdale, Trinity Univ. Lib., San Antonio*

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From [Booklist](#)

So much is unknown, but the modesty of this first-rank team of scientists and illustrators makes all the more trustworthy their seven-chapter telling of the evolutionary story as it is now tentatively interpreted. Gould, of *Bully for Brontosaurus* fame, leads off with an essay on iconography, the visual depiction of fossils since recognition of their antediluvian origins in the early 1800s. That's appropriate, since this album's illustrations--200 of them, in color--surround the text, excite the sense of wonder, and vivify the past. Further sharpening the book's visual impact, there are bright diagrams, captions, and a phylogeny (the latest concept in speciation) for each crucial argument--such as ancient forms of metabolism or the evidence for a Permian extinction that wiped out 95 percent of all species, clearing the way for dinosaurs. But the writers are no slouches, either, pacing the sequence of change through time's abyssal vastness and showing the slight opportunities that eventuated in the reign of fishes, reptiles, dinosaurs, mammals, and humans--while reminding the reader that evolution progresses not in a simple-to-complex fashion but is a blizzard of improvisations and haphazardry. A marvelous book. *Gilbert Taylor*

Users Review

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Barbara Lewis:

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