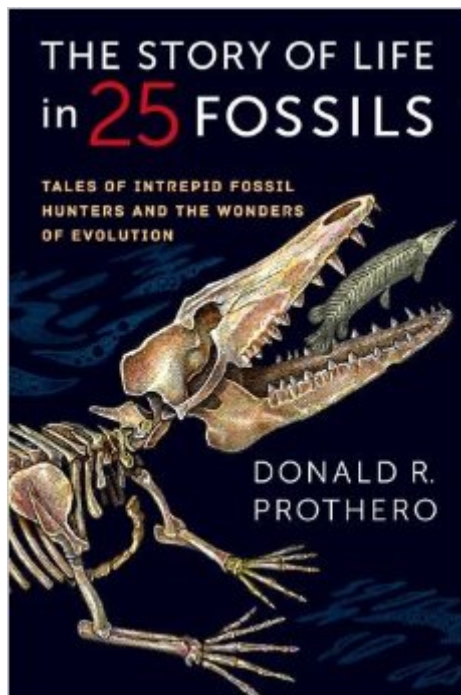


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The Story Of Life In 25 Fossils: Tales Of Intrepid Fossil Hunters And The Wonders Of Evolution



Synopsis

Every fossil tells a story. Best-selling paleontology author Donald R. Prothero describes twenty-five famous, beautifully preserved fossils in a gripping scientific history of life on Earth. Recounting the adventures behind the discovery of these objects and fully interpreting their significance within the larger fossil record, Prothero creates a riveting history of life on our planet. The twenty-five fossils portrayed in this book catch animals in their evolutionary splendor as they transition from one kind of organism to another. We witness extinct plants and animals of microscopic and immense size and thrilling diversity. We learn about fantastic land and sea creatures that have no match in nature today. Along the way, we encounter such fascinating fossils as the earliest trilobite, *Olenellus*; the giant shark *Carcharocles*; the "fishibian" *Tiktaalik*; the "Frogamander" and the "Turtle on the Half-Shell"; enormous marine reptiles and the biggest dinosaurs known; the first bird, *Archaeopteryx*; the walking whale *Ambulocetus*; the gigantic hornless rhinoceros *Paraceratherium*, the largest land mammal that ever lived; and the *Australopithecus* nicknamed "Lucy," the oldest human skeleton. We meet the scientists and adventurers who pioneered paleontology and learn about the larger intellectual and social contexts in which their discoveries were made. Finally, we find out where to see these splendid fossils in the world's great museums. Ideal for all who love prehistoric landscapes and delight in the history of science, this book makes a treasured addition to any bookshelf, stoking curiosity in the evolution of life on Earth.

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Customer Reviews

Donald Prothero's "The Story of Life in 25 Fossils: Tales of Intrepid Fossil Hunters and the Wonders

of Evolution" is a rare popular science treasure; one of the finest, most accessible, books on paleontology written for a public audience. It is a most ingenious concept, telling the history of life on Planet Earth from the perspective of twenty-five extinct fossil taxa, that no other science writer - either a scientist or a science journalist - has ever attempted before. It is an especially compelling journey conveyed by Prothero's fine prose and storytelling talent. As much as I admire his superb "Evolution: What the Fossils Say and Why It Matters" - written primarily as an eloquent defense from creationist attacks of the fossil record as key evidence in support of the fact of biological evolution - "The Story of Life in 25 Fossils" goes much further in conveying the excitement and wonder of paleontology, not least because of its superb appendices at the end of each chapter, indicating where the public can see fossils on display not only in the United States but elsewhere around the globe. "The Story of Life in 25 Fossils" is a linear literary trek through the history of life, starting with the first appearance of stromatolites ("Chapter 1: Planet of the Scum") in the Precambrian and culminating with the evolution of humans ("Chapter 25: Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds"). Prothero excels in providing readers with terse biographies of some of the most notable fossil hunters, like Mary Anning, the semi-literate fossil hunter who discovered some of the earliest, most complete, ichthyosaur skeletons, best remembered today as the "Mary" who sells seashells by the seashore ("Chapter 14: King of the Sea-Lizards").

Right at the beginning of *The Story of Life in 25 Fossils: Tales of Intrepid Fossil Hunters and the Wonders of Evolution* (Columbia University Press), paleontologist Donald R. Prothero shows Darwin's importance as a scientist. Oh, of course, Darwin had the brilliant insight about evolution, and had all sorts of admirable qualities as a scientist and as a human being. But one of his best traits was that he knew, and acknowledged publicly, where his theory was weak. He admitted that could not, when his *On the Origin of Species* was published in 1859, answer questions about transitional species, those links between ancestors and progeny showing how animals changed in their lines of descent. Prothero explains that when Darwin was writing, almost nothing was known of transitional fossils. Darwin's insights had to be made without their evidence. Now they are among the strongest confirmations of evolution, and Prothero here takes us through 25 examples to tell the stories about how the evidence was amassed and interpreted. There are millions of species he could have chosen, but these 25 show critical stages of evolution and also some of the most extreme examples of evolution at work. The resultant book, written with bright enthusiasm and describing clearly how the fossil record shows evolution to have occurred, is a wonderful primer about what paleontologists do. Sure, the fossil halls are among the most popular

rooms of any natural history museum, but here is why the fossils are important. The very first chapter has to do with the microbial mats and resultant domed stromatolites, which were the way the Earth manifested life for most of the history that it had life on it. The bacteria of the stromatolites formed colonies, but they were not multicellular creatures.

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