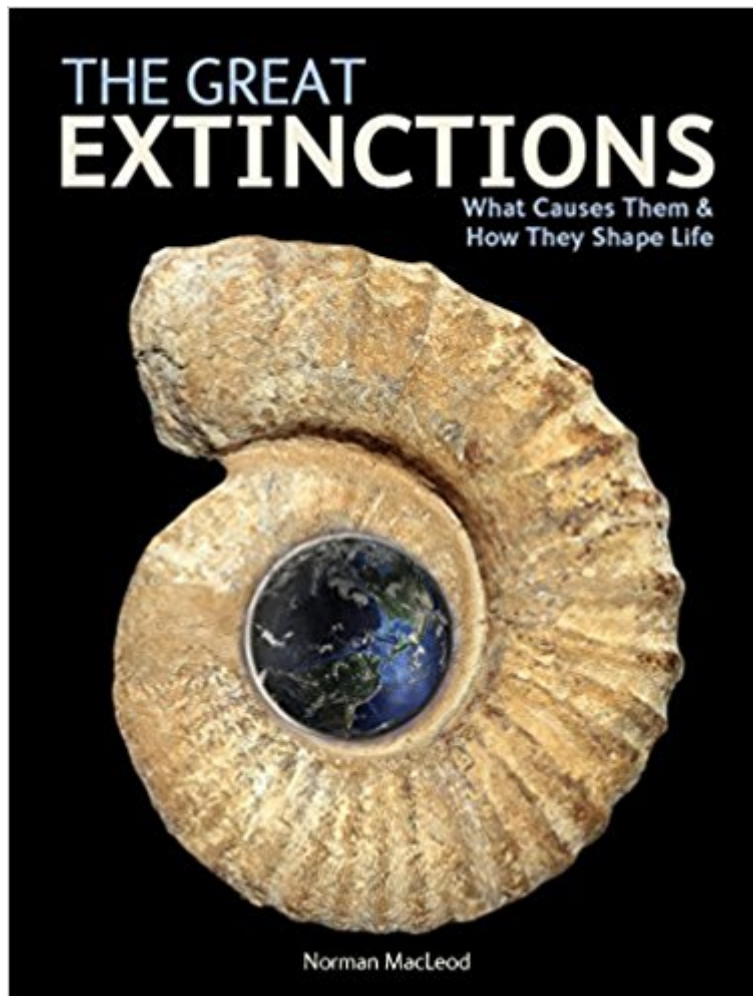




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The Great Extinctions: What Causes Them And How They Shape Life



Synopsis

Population sizes of vertebrate species -- mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, and fish -- have declined by 52 percent over the last 40 years. In other words, those populations around the globe have dropped by more than half in fewer than two human generations. -- World Wildlife Fund Living Planet report 2014 This book straddles an awkward boundary between being a colorful popular work and a scientific literature review.... Profusely and beautifully illustrated with figures, maps, charts, and period reconstructions. Recommended. -- Choice A good introduction to the great puzzle that is extinction study. -- Publishers Weekly Selected by the Scientific American Book Club and now a more affordable paperback for a far-wider audience. For more than a century scientists have tried to identify and understand the precise processes responsible for species extinction. Solving the species extinction puzzle has become even more important, even urgent, as human populations and technologies rival sea-level change, volcanic eruptions and asteroid impacts as an extinction mechanism. The Great Extinctions explores the search for an understanding of Earth's five great extinction events and whether the sixth is upon us already. Leading paleontologist Norman MacLeod examines the controversies and conclusions and what they mean to the efforts to preserve Earth's biodiversity. He also reveals how, contrary to popular conception, species extinction is as natural a process as species evolution. Examining extinction over geological time, he compares ancient extinction events and uses them to predict future extinctions. Featuring the latest scientific evidence on the subject and informative illustrations and diagrams, The Great Extinctions is an easy-to-understand presentation of a complex and controversial subject.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

[Review of hardcover edition] MacLeod takes readers on an interesting 500 million year excursion through the history of life and death on Earth. The first five chapters provide definitions, context, and historical perspective for the current understanding of stratigraphy, the fossil record, and the classification of life within an evolutionary framework. The book concisely offers insight into the limits of knowledge within these fields, and these insights give non-experts some basis to evaluate competing opinions. Macleod also provides a window into the to-and-fro of the scientific process where theories can migrate from the lunatic fringe to scientific orthodoxy as new observations come to light. MacLeod analyses eight extinction events beginning in the Precambrian Eon and working towards the near past. Each chapter follows a format that allows readers to compare key elements from each event. Scientific terminology from the geological timescale and biological classification can be daunting but excellent graphs, pictures, and diagrams help to clarify and enliven difficult subject matter. Overall, it is a good introduction to the great puzzle that is extinction study, impressive in its presentation of the scope of work already done and tantalizing to the curious with countless mysteries still unsolved. (Publishers Weekly Web Exclusive 2013-03-13)

Norman MacLeod is Keeper of Palaeontology at the Natural History Museum, London. He studies the origin and maintenance of form in fossil and modern organisms using mathematical models of shape variation. He also creates new mathematical tools for studying plant and animal form and develops systems for automating the identification of species.

A fascinating comparison of all the extinctions known in geologic history. Also, Mr. McLeod makes a clear case for the great asteroid event NOT being the single cause of the Cretaceous extinction of the dinosaurs.

good condition;as advertised

Excellent condition and nicely organized information, accurate and clearly written.

great

This is an intelligent assessment of an intriguing aspect of life science. We come away with the sense that the extinctions were less dramatic and more gradual than we hoped but that the author

has mastered the field and he is right. So why are there short reviews on the back cover which differ with the author's conclusions?

Initially I was a bit down on the book, but as I got into it my interest kindled more interest, especially with regard to their explanations regarding the extinctions AND, clearly, how Science works. Puts, clearly, a plug in the maws of science deniers. Great format and well conceived approaches, and not so "esoteric" as to scare folks away.

Well written

This is a well written book and gives a wonderful overview.

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