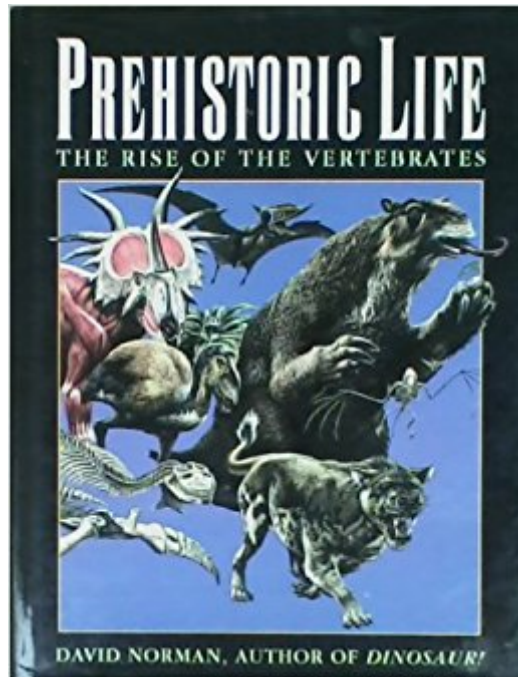




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Prehistoric Life: The Rise Of The Vertebrates



Synopsis

In this fascinating and beautifully illustrated volume, the author of *Dinosaur!* unravels the complex mystery of life on Earth, from the emergence of the earliest organisms to the rise of the human race. Illustrated throughout with photographs, explanatory diagrams, and stunning artwork by world-renowned artist John Sibbick.

Book Information

Hardcover: 248 pages

Publisher: John Wiley & Sons Inc; X-Library - 1st edition (December 1994)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0671799401

ISBN-13: 978-0671799403

Product Dimensions: 1 x 9.5 x 12.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 3.3 pounds

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars 5 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,003,086 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #31 in Books > Science & Math > Biological Sciences > Paleontology > Vertebrate #206 in Books > Science & Math > Biological Sciences > Animals > Fossils #2363 in Books > Children's Books > Education & Reference > Math

Customer Reviews

This sequel to Norman's successful *Dinosaur!* (LJ 11/1/91) is an ambitious attempt to draw a broader picture of the evolution of vertebrate animals and to trace the threads of human ancestry from the first primitive organisms (the first page shows the Milky Way and the last, a group of people). It examines questions about the advantages of various evolutionary adaptations that allowed vertebrate animals to live on land, adapt to different environmental conditions, and compete with one another. The book is especially good at showing prehistoric animals in the context of their environments, and color illustrations by John Sibbick bring the creatures to life. The focus on mammals sometimes gives them undue prominence over other types of animals, and the theme of human evolution occasionally gets sidetracked. Still, this is an interesting, well-written, and thoughtful treatment of a very complex topic for general readers. Amy Brunvand, Univ. of Utah, Salt Lake City
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This is a wonderful book, one of my five favorites when it comes to paleontology. Where to begin!

First all, the book covers the entire history of life on earth, beginning with the origin of the earth itself, through the beginning of life, the advent of multicellular life, the bizarre Vendian fauna of the late Precambrian, through the now famous world of the Burgess Shale, into the explosion of life in the seas of the Cambrian, on into the debut of fishes, the conquering of land by plants, insects, and amphibians, to the development of reptiles, all the way through early mammals, dinosaurs, pterosaurs, the Cenozoic "Age of Mammals," the Ice Ages, and early man. As I have pointed out in other reviews, too many books focus exclusively or mainly on dinosaurs, and David Norman deserves high credit for not neglecting other aspects of the development of life on earth. Second, he is thorough in his coverage on most aspects of the paleontological record. In his section on trilobites for instance, he has photographs of trilobite fossils and artists' illustrations of trilobites swimming, molting, walking, curling up in defense, egg laying, and plowing the seabed for food. The accompanying text is no less detailed and useful. On the lengthy section of conquering the land, Norman has a great diagram showing the major structural changes that fishes underwent to conquer the terrestrial world (particularly in the areas of the pelvic and pectoral girdles and the spine), several illustrations of amphibian skeletons, and several nice illustrations of early amphibians, both individually and in the context of their environment. Dinosaurs as you might imagine get a huge section, with an entire additional chapter devoted to the evolution of birds and dinosaur-bird relationships (including discussion of issues of dinosaur endothermy). Marine reptiles of the Mesozoic are not neglected, with many excellent illustrations including some very fine paintings, photographs of fossils, and a diagram illustrating the differences between the swimming and body styles of three main groups, ichthyosaurs, plesiosaurs, and pliosaurs. The section on extinct mammals and mammalian evolution is quite thorough and one of my favorites, as extinct mammals are otherwise very poorly covered in the popular literature. In a readable and engaging format Norman discusses such varied topics in this area as the differences between birds and mammals with regards to the efficiency of their breathing systems, the evolutionary history of Australia's marsupials, the Great Faunal Interchange between North and South America, the evolution of whales, and the rise of grasslands and the role that played in mammalian evolution. Third, the book, as you might gather, is richly illustrated. Though very much a great text one can sit down and read, it is packed with excellent photographs, drawings, and paintings of fossils, skeletons, animals and plants as they appeared in life, and prehistoric environments. Personal favorites include on pages 100-101 the early reptile *Hylonomus* scampering after a meal in a coal swamp, on pages 136-137 a scene of two Late Triassic pterosaurs fishing for a meal, and a *Gigantopithecus* family with associated fauna and flora on page 219. Fourth (do you still need a

reason to buy this book?) the book is very readable. Though quite accurate (though unfortunately one or two aspects of its coverage of the Burgess Shale and dinosaurs are a bit dated, hard to avoid), it is not a difficult read and one need not be a professional biologist. Relevant terms are well explained, often with the aid of diagrams and charts.

Norman planned this book in order to provide a pleasant and highly understandable reading without lack of information, covering everything related to pre-historic life, from the greatest animals to the life development hypothesis. It also brings to the reader one of the best visions of life succession and evolution on Earth. It's wonderfully illustrated with some pictures that you can see in famous museum exhibitions, such as the Deinonychus attack, from UK National History Museum (pages 158-159) and many others. It is my favourite pre-historic book and I strongly believe that it is a must for every natural science library or collection. It's suitable for everyone interested in a good and clear approach in this subject. It's not properly a scholar book but it can be a great help even for paleontology students.

The book is logically put together and is beautiful in format. Although our library has assigned a Youth designation, the book would make an excellent text for a full-year course in paleontology at senior high school or college level, and serve as a reference work thereafter.

This book is one of the best of its kind. It uncovers the Evolution of vertebrates in a perfect way. Beautiful illustrations, which make the animals feel closer to you than ever. This book is really a pleasure to read!!!

This book was very interesting because it covered vertebrates from the very beginning (origin of the universe), but it was still very thorough. Very good illustrations and pictures.

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