



Terra: Our 100-Million-Year-Old Ecosystem--and the Threats That Now Put It at Risk

Michael Novacek

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A paleontologist awakens us to the "extinction event" that human activity is bringing about today

The natural world as humans have always known it evolved close to 100 million years ago, with the appearance of flowering plants and pollinating insects during the age of the dinosaurs. Its tremendous history is now in danger of profound, catastrophic disruption. In *Terra*, a brilliant synthesis of evolutionary biology, paleontology, and modern environmental science, Michael Novacek shows how all three can help us understand and prevent what he (and others) call today's "mass extinction event."

Humanity's use of land, our consumption, the pollution we create, and our contributions to global warming are causing this crisis. True, the fossil record of hundreds of millions of years reveals that wild and bounteous nature has always evolved not quietly but thunderously, as species arise, flourish, die off, and are replaced by new species. We learn from paleontology and archaeology that for 50,000 years, human hunting, mining, and agriculture have changed many localities, sometimes irrevocably. But today, Novacek insists, our behavior endangers the entire global ecosystem. And if we disregard—through ignorance, antipathy, or apathy—the theory of evolution that developed with our modern understanding of the Earth's past, we not only impede enlightenment but threaten any practical strategy for our own survival.

The evolutionary future of the entire living planet depends on our understanding this.

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