



# The Variety of Life: A Survey and a Celebration of All the Creatures that Have Ever Lived

*Colin Tudge*

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## **The Variety of Life: A Survey and a Celebration of All the Creatures that Have Ever Lived** Colin Tudge

Here, between the covers of one capacious book, is an illustrated summary of all the creatures that have ever lived, a vast compendium of earth's current and former inhabitants in all their dazzling and infinite diversity. Colin Tudge argues that we are entering a new phase of biology in which, for the first time, biologists are achieving profound insight into life's true diversity and developing the tools to keep track of it. *The Variety of Life* heralds this new phase. The first part of the book describes why biologists now feel that there could have been as many as 4,000 billion species on Earth since life began. It then discusses the need for classification, beginning with the most basic principles--the strictly practical classification of fishmongers and foresters, who speak of "shellfish" and differentiate "hardwood" from "softwood"--and moves on to explore the intriguing deliberations of the modern "transformed cladists" and the novel contributions of molecular genetics. Part II describes the creatures themselves. It is divided into 24 sections, each describing a different group, illustrated by nearly 50 double-page spreads which present genealogical "trees" that summarize the evolutionary relationships between the creatures in each group. Some sections describe large, comprehensive groups such as the kingdoms of the Animals or the Plants. Others treat similar sub-groups in more detail, such as the Mammals, a class, or the Hominids, a family. In lively and accessible prose, all the significant groups of creatures--both alive and extinct--are described and their relationships clarified. For general readers and serious biologists alike, *The Variety of Life* offers an unprecedented storehouse of knowledge of life on earth.

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