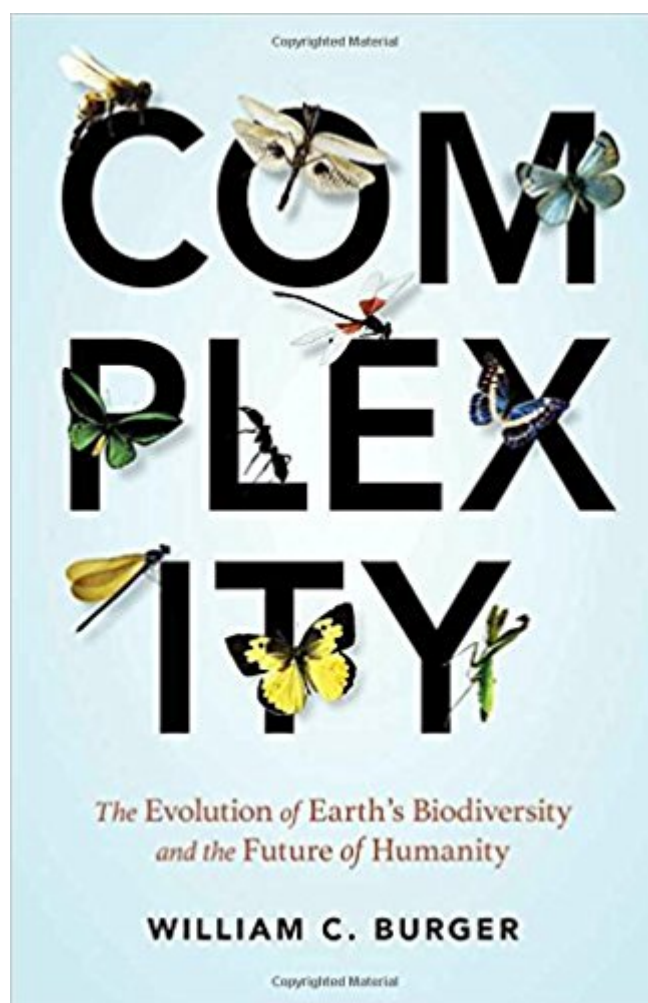


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Complexity: The Evolution Of Earth's Biodiversity And The Future Of Humanity



Synopsis

This very readable overview of natural history explores the dynamics that have made our planet so rich in biodiversity over time and supported the rise and dominance of our own species. Tracing the arc of evolutionary history, biologist William C. Burger shows that cooperation and symbiosis have played a critical role in the ever increasing complexity of life on earth. Life may have started from the evolution of cooperating organic molecules, which outpaced their noncooperating neighbors. A prime example of symbiosis was the early incorporation of mitochondria into the eukaryotic cell (through a process called "endosymbiosis"). This event gave these cells a powerful new source of energy. Later, cooperation was again key when millions to trillions of individual eukaryotic cells eventually came together to build the unitary structures of large plants and animals. And cooperation between individuals of the same species resulted in complex animal societies, such as ant colonies and bee hives. Turning to our own species, the author argues that our ability to cooperate, along with incessant inter-group conflict, has driven the advancement of cultures, the elaboration of our technologies, and made us the most "invasive" species on the planet. But our very success has now become a huge problem, as our world dominion threatens the future of the biosphere and confronts us with a very uncertain future. Thought-provoking and full of fascinating detail, this eloquently told story of life on earth and our place within it presents a grand perspective and raises many important questions.

Book Information

Hardcover: 380 pages

Publisher: Prometheus Books (June 14, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1633881938

ISBN-13: 978-1633881938

Product Dimensions: 6.3 x 1.2 x 9.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 13.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars 1 customer review

Best Sellers Rank: #380,492 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #113 in [Books > Science & Math > Evolution > Organic](#) #202 in [Books > Textbooks > Science & Mathematics > Biology & Life Sciences > Botany](#) #386 in [Books > Science & Math > Nature & Ecology > Natural History](#)

Customer Reviews

“William C. Burger pours decades of experience into this readable overview of how our

complex world came to be. Breezy and engaging all the way, this is a stimulating reflection on what has brought us to the beginning of the twenty-first century, and about what might come next.

•Sir Peter Crane, FRS, author of *Ginkgo: The Tree That Time Forgot*

“A charmingly written, lovely, and informative book that could be profitably read by any educated person, from high-school students on up. In it, Burger deftly outlines the history of our planet and the living organisms that make it what it is. He brings us forward to directly consider the global problem that we have created for ourselves and our common future.”

•Peter H. Raven, president emeritus, Missouri Botanical Garden, St. Louis

“Over the course of a career, many scientists become progressively more specialized—they focus on a narrow topic of interest and explore its many dimensions. Bill Burger has done precisely the opposite over the course of his career. An acclaimed botanist who is proficient in the arcane arts of botanical nomenclature and still carries a Hastings triplet loupe, Burger has turned his sights on the diversity of life. Non-technical language conveys the patterns and processes associated with life’s immense variation, identifying those involved in its generation and extinction. By pulling human evolution into the narrative, Burger provides the perspective needed to appreciate why scientists are convening later this year to formalize a new geological epoch, the Anthropocene, the Age of Humans.”

•Bruce D Patterson, zoologist, Field Museum of Natural History

William C. Burger is Curator Emeritus of the Department of Botany at The Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago, Illinois, and the author of the highly acclaimed *Flowers: How They Changed the World* and *Perfect Planet, Clever Species*.

This well written book is a wonderful introduction to the rich and complex life on planet earth. The author gives a detailed, yet highly accesible description of how life evolved and diversified. The different habitats from the poles to the tropics are reviewed in depth. Everyone who ever strolled through a jungle or enjoyed a safari will find here ample explanations and ideas. The book is suitable both for lay and for professionals and is highly recommended.

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