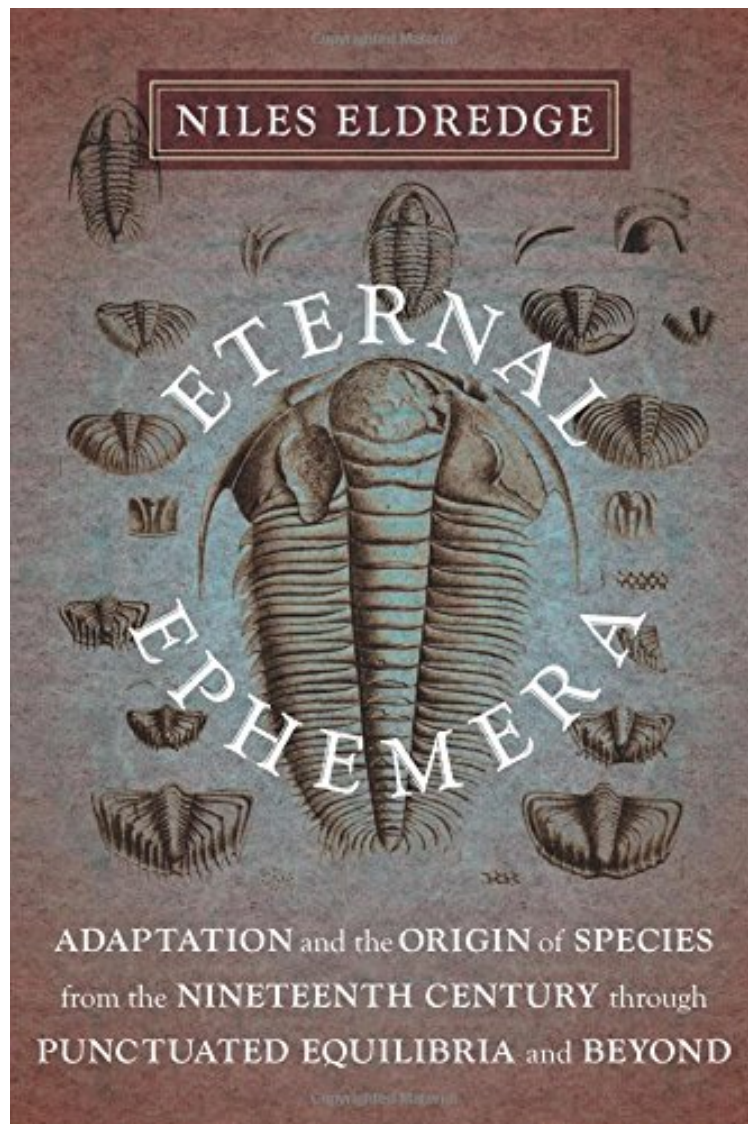


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Eternal Ephemera: Adaptation and the Origin of Species from the Nineteenth Century Through Punctuated Equilibria and Beyond

Niles Eldredge

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All organisms and species are transitory, yet life endures. The origin, extinction, and evolution of speciesinterconnected in the web of life as "eternal ephemera"are the concern of evolutionary biology. In this riveting work, renowned paleontologist Niles Eldredge follows leading thinkers as they have wrestled for more than two hundred years with the eternal skein of life composed of ephemeral beings, revitalizing evolutionary science with their own, more resilient findings.Eldredge begins in France with the naturalist Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, who in 1801 first framed the overarching question about the emergence of new species. The Italian geologist Giambattista Brocchi followed, bringing in geology and paleontology to expand the question. In 1825, at the University of Edinburgh, Robert Grant and Robert Jameson introduced the astounding ideas formulated by Lamarck and Brocchi to a young medical student named Charles Darwin. Who can doubt that Darwin left for his voyage on the Beagle in 1831 filled with thoughts about these daring new explanations for the "transmutation" of species.Eldredge revisits Darwin's early insights into evolution in South America and his later synthesis of knowledge into a theory of the origin of species. He then considers the ideas of more recent evolutionary thinkers, such as George Gaylord Simpson, Ernst Mayr, and Theodosius Dobzhansky, as well as the young and brash Niles Eldredge and Steven Jay Gould, who set science afire with their concept of punctuated equilibria. Filled with insights into evolutionary biology and told with a rich affection for the scientific arena, this book celebrates the organic, vital relationship between scientific thinking and its subjects.

Very cutting edge. The historical insights in this book are original and bring in interesting and important themes in the thinking about species and speciation. (Donald R. Prothero, author of Evolution: What the Fossils Say and Why it Matters)In this beautifully written book, Niles Eldredge explores not only how scientific views of the origins of species have changed over the past two hundred years but also why they have changed. It is an enthralling personal view of the history of one of the most difficult problems in evolution, written by a leading paleobiologist whose work has helped mold our understanding of the tempo and mode of the diversification of life. A sheer pleasure to read. (John N. Thompson, University of California, Santa Cruz)Niles Eldredge has been one of the most innovative and critical theoretical evolutionary biologists of the past forty years. Now he returns to the roots of modern evolutionary biology to set the stage for new helpful proposals that move evolutionary theory forward. This is required reading for anyone with a serious interest in evolutionary biology. (Daniel Brooks, University of Toronto)Paleontological and evolutionary pioneer Niles Eldredge has produced a scientific and scholarly gem of a book. Lucidly written, it covers the history and science of adaptation and the origin of species, with special emphasis placed on how paleontologists helped to build and expand the evolutionary synthesis. Everyone interested in evolution and paleontology will enjoy reading it. (Bruce S. Lieberman, University of Kansas)Eternal Ephemera is the most articulate and forceful presentation of the concept and implications of punctuated equilibria, originally formulated by Niles Eldredge and Stephen J. Gould, a concept that has played a major role in the research and development of the theory of evolution over the last four decades. Eldredge's scholarly and bibliographic analysis of the historical precedents, from before Darwin to the present, of the related concepts of taxic versus phyletic evolutionary change is impressive. Eternal Ephemera deserves to be read by every evolutionist. (Francisco J. Ayala, University of California, Irvine)Eternal Ephemera offers a brilliantly researched and highly readable context for understanding the development of Darwinian models of evolution. It is a book that should be read by everyone, and perhaps especially those who have questions about evolution. (Simon Underdown Times Higher Education)A must-read for armchair biologists! (Booklist (*Starred))A meticulously researched history of evolutionary theories that will likely be unfamiliar to most readers. (Science)A masterful work by one of the most influential paleontologists of the past half century, this is a must read for every serious student of evolutionary biology. (Choice)A clear, useful, and well-written book that critically discusses and analyzes the rise and decline of the taxic perspective in biology and paleontology from the early nineteenth century onwards. (History and Philosophy of the Life Sciences)Fascinating and well-written. (Isis)About the AuthorNiles Eldredge is a paleontologist formerly on the curatorial staff of the American Museum of Natural History. He developed the theory of punctuated equilibria with Stephen Jay Gould, and his book The Pattern of Evolution offers a comprehensive theory of how environmental change governs the evolutionary process. He is also the author of Life in the Balance: Humanity and the Biodiversity Crisis and The Triumph of Evolution... and the Failure of Creationism and was a coeditor of the journal Evolution: Education and Outreach.