

*Book Review***Mammal Evolution, an Illustrated Guide**

R.J.G. Savage and M.R. Long

British Museum of Natural History (1986)
258 pp.

This book is aimed at the reader with a general interest in palaeontology, but is also suitable as a reference source for students of mammal evolution. The format is imaginative, containing numerous excellent illustrations. The author introduces his subject with a discussion on the processes of fossilization and global plate tectonics. This is followed by an outline of modern mammal taxonomy and a description of how the structural anatomy of fossils can be related to their probable function.

The body of the text discusses the mammal – reptile interface and continues to encompass the more recent mammal

groups which are divided on ecological lines. These include the insectivores, carnivores, paddlers and swimmers, gliders and fliers, gnawers, rooters and browsers, mammals on island continents, hooved herbivores and finally primate evolution, including that of the hominids.

The most striking aspect of the book is the illustrations. They create a Tolkien-like scenario of the extinct fauna which this reader found fascinating, a far cry from the long lists of unpronounceable names which all too often dog the pages of books on this subject. The exciting visual images are ably backed by a detailed and informative text.

I found the book interesting and enjoyable to read, although the discussion becomes tedious on occasion, but in a book intended as a general reference this may be unavoidable. The strength of the book lies in its visual presentation which is supported by a well-written and up-to-date text. In my opinion the authors have succeeded with their innovative approach to the story of the evolution of the mammals and I therefore recommend this book to those interested in this topic. It is however, unlikely to satisfy the needs of the specialist.

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