

Preface	7
Introduction	19

## The Earth's living mantle 23

1. The history of the biosphere	25
1.1 The evolution of the planet Earth . . . . . [L. Margulis, R. Guerrero and J.M. Camarasa]	27
1.1.1 From prehistoric times to the present day . . . . .	27
The formation of the planet . . . . .	27
The Earth's present structure . . . . .	27
1.1.2 Drifting plates . . . . .	30
The Earth's crust . . . . .	30
Plate tectonics . . . . .	30
Contact between the plates . . . . .	31
Rift valleys . . . . .	33
• Time: The fourth dimension in geology . . . . . [A. Garriga]	34
1.1.3 The formation of the continents . . . . .	38
The oldest lands . . . . .	38
The Proterozoic continents . . . . .	39
From the first Pangaea to Gondwana . . . . .	41
The break-up of Gondwana . . . . .	41
Recent history . . . . .	42
1.1.4 The crust of the ocean floors . . . . .	43
Oceanic ridges . . . . .	43
Subduction of the oceanic plates . . . . .	45

<b>1.1.5 The current configuration of the emerged lands</b> .....	45
Mountains that grow and basins that fill .....	46
• Rocks with fossil remains and sediments .....	[A. Garriga] 48
The emerged continental masses .....	52
<b>1.2 The history of the atmosphere and climate</b> .....	[L. Margulis, R. Guerrero and J.M. Camarasa] 56
<b>1.2.1. An Earth without atmosphere, an atmosphere without oxygen</b> .....	56
The origin of the Earth's atmosphere .....	56
The climatology of the original atmosphere .....	57
<b>1.2.2 Between fire and ice: ancient climatic changes</b> .....	57
Glaciations at the end of the Proterozoic .....	57
Climatic conditions in the Paleozoic .....	57
Climatic conditions in the Mesozoic .....	59
Climatic conditions in the Cenozoic .....	59
<b>1.2.3 The most recent glaciations</b> .....	60
The Quaternary glaciations .....	60
The origin of glaciations .....	61
Glacial periods .....	62
The geological consequences of glaciations .....	62
The biological consequences of glaciations .....	65
• Frozen mammoths and other discoveries .....	[A. Garriga] 66
<b>1.2.4 The climate of the last ten thousand years</b> .....	70
The last glaciations .....	70
The climate of modern times .....	70
<b>1.3 The history of life</b> .....	[L. Margulis, R. Guerrero and J.M. Camarasa] 74
<b>1.3.1 The phenomenon of life</b> .....	74
Life and the blue planet .....	74
The obscure beginning .....	74
The molecular bases of life .....	76
The biogenetic process .....	77
• Life, the Earth's heritage .....	[L. Margulis and D. Sagan] 80
<b>1.3.2 Evolution without oxygen</b> .....	84
First biochemical strategies .....	84
Fermentation .....	86
Nitrogen from the air .....	86
Sulfate reduction from the water .....	86
Toward photosynthesis .....	88
Mobility and protection against radiation .....	91
Gene repair and sexuality .....	91
<b>1.3.3 Oxygen, the first global pollutant</b> .....	92
The origin of oxygen .....	92
Oxidative processes .....	93
The formation of an oxidizing world .....	96
• Gaia: is the Earth alive? .....	[A. Marcer] 100
<b>1.3.4 From bacteria to protists</b> .....	104
The appearance of the eukaryotes: the acritarchs .....	104
The origin of the eukaryotic cell .....	105

1.3.5	The evolution of the first eukaryotes	112
	The rise of sexual reproduction	112
	Cellular specialization	117
	The appearance of multicellular organisms	118
1.3.6	The conquest of the land	122
	The first terrestrial plants	123
	The first terrestrial animals	123
	The case of the fungi	126
1.3.7	The emergence of a landscape dominated by life	126
	The Devonian swamps	126
	Carboniferous and Permian forests	127
	• Coal, oil, and natural gas	[A. Garriga] 130
	Mesozoic landscapes	134
	• Warm-blooded reptiles?	[A. Garriga] 136
	Cenozoic biomes	141
2.	Matter, energy, and organization: the workings of the biosphere	143
2.1	The blue planet	[R. Margalef] 145
2.1.1	One in a million	145
	The complexity of singular things	145
	Life in the universe	146
	Our Sun	147
	The planets and life	148
2.1.2	Lands, seas and the atmosphere	150
	Structure and organization	150
	Lithospheric plates	151
	The planet's fluid coverings	152
2.1.3	The climate	156
	Climatic elements	156
	Atmospheric weather and forecasting	159
2.1.4	The very fine and torn film of life	161
	The biosphere	161
	Ecosystems	162
	Ecotones	163
2.2	The material of life	[R. Margalef] 164
2.2.1	The elements of life	164
	The chemical components of life	164
	The architecture of living molecules	166
2.2.2	Nutrient paths: closed circuit, open circuit	168
	Deposits and flows	168

Circulation and recycling . . . . .	169
Ecosystem strategies . . . . .	170
Organism strategies . . . . .	172
Interaction between production factors . . . . .	172
Transport mechanisms . . . . .	173
<b>2.2.3 Terrestrial and aquatic environments . . . . .</b>	<b>174</b>
Forests and plankton . . . . .	174
Plants and water . . . . .	176
<b>2.3 Energy to create and destroy . . . . . [R. Margalef]</b>	<b>179</b>
<b>2.3.1 The driving light from the Sun . . . . .</b>	<b>179</b>
<b>2.3.2. The natural greens of autonomous life . . . . .</b>	<b>181</b>
Energy capture . . . . .	181
The mechanisms of photosynthesis . . . . .	183
Photosynthesis in the biosphere . . . . .	186
<b>2.3.3 Food: the dependency of animals on subsidiary life . . . . .</b>	<b>192</b>
Heterotrophic life . . . . .	192
The nature of food . . . . .	193
Food processing . . . . .	195
Trophic webs . . . . .	196
<b>2.3.4 Dust from the dead . . . . .</b>	<b>200</b>
Dead material . . . . .	200
The interaction between biosphere and lithosphere . . . . .	200
• Nuclear, solar, or fossil energy . . . . .	202
<b>2.3.5 Full sail or full steam ahead . . . . .</b>	<b>206</b>
Endosomatic and exosomatic energy . . . . .	206
The effects of exosomatic energy on life . . . . .	206
The human species and energy consumption . . . . .	207
<b>2.4 Living beings and information . . . . . [R. Margalef]</b>	<b>209</b>
<b>2.4.1 The rules of the game . . . . .</b>	<b>209</b>
Diversity, scale and time . . . . .	209
Entropy and the irreversibility of changes . . . . .	210
Complexity and information . . . . .	211
• Compiling information in chromosomes . . . . .	212
<b>2.4.2 The rules of the game . . . . .</b>	<b>216</b>
Causal strategy versus inferential strategy . . . . .	216
The social compromise or ecosystem . . . . .	217
Ecological guilds . . . . .	217
The organization of relationships . . . . .	220
Diversity and wealth . . . . .	221
Interaction between species . . . . .	222
Social organization . . . . .	224
<b>2.4.3 Memory and changes . . . . .</b>	<b>225</b>
Succession and disturbances . . . . .	226
Succession, a history matrix . . . . .	230
Lazy nature . . . . .	231

1. Humans in the biosphere	237
1.1 The human race: the same, but different . . . . . [J. Bertranpetit and R. Folch]	239
1.1.1 Anthropocentrism—an untenable position . . . . . [R. Folch]	239
1.1.2 The objective peculiarities of the human species. . . . . [R. Folch]	239
An intelligent, omnivorous, and accommodating species. . . . .	239
Farmers and stockbreeders: producers of forced surpluses. . . . .	243
Scientists and technicians: controllers of information and energy . . . . .	244
Politicians and priests: masters of the visible and the invisible . . . . .	245
An ambitious and senseless species: plunderers and contaminators of the environment. . . . .	247
A civilized species, nonetheless: managers of natural resources . . . . .	248
1.1.3 The objective, zoological nature of humans . . . . . [J. Bertranpetit]	248
Humans: a group of primates. . . . .	248
The characteristics of hominids . . . . .	250
1.2 The process of hominization. . . . . [J. Bertranpetit]	251
1.2.1 The oldest fragmentary remains. . . . .	251
The African cradle. . . . .	251
The Rift Valley finds . . . . .	252
1.2.2 The typical australopithecines: <i>Australopithecus boisei</i> , <i>A. robustus</i> and <i>A. africanus</i> . . . . .	255
The eastern African sites: Olduvai, Turkana and others . . . . .	255
The South African sites: Kromdraai, Makapansgat and others . . . . .	255
The robust australopithecines: feeding specialization . . . . .	256
The slender australopithecines: the path towards the first humans . . . . .	256
1.2.3 The dawn of the humans: <i>Homo habilis</i> . . . . .	258
The makers of the first tools . . . . .	258
The jigsaw puzzle of the hominids . . . . .	259
• Molecules and human evolution. . . . .	260
1.3 The expansion of humans. . . . . [J. Bertranpetit]	264
1.3.1 The first true humans: <i>Homo erectus</i> . . . . .	264
The difficulty of delimitating the species. . . . .	264
The characteristics of the first humans. . . . .	265
Known remains and the taxonomic confusion. . . . .	265
1.3.2 The emergence of our species: primitive <i>Homo sapiens</i> . . . . .	268
The oldest fossils . . . . .	268
The Neanderthal explosion . . . . .	271
• What was life like for the first humans? . . . . .	276
• Magdalenian fauna and art . . . . . [J.M. Camarasa]	280
1.3.3 The expansion of humanity: present day <i>Homo sapiens</i> . . . . .	284
The origin of modern humans . . . . .	284
Expansion and colonization of new lands . . . . .	286
The diversification of the present human species . . . . .	287

<b>1.4 The anthropic modification of the biosphere</b> . . . . .	[J.M. Camarasa and R. Margalef]	289
<b>1.4.1 The gradual control of food production</b> . . . . .	[J.M. Camarasa]	289
The attitude of primitive humans . . . . .		289
The Neolithic revolution . . . . .		290
The consolidation of agriculture and livestock breeding . . . . .		299
<b>1.4.2 Control of flows of energy and information</b> . . . . .	[J.M. Camarasa]	300
The advent of the Industrial Revolution . . . . .		300
The first industrial innovations . . . . .		302
The consolidation of industrial society . . . . .		303
• Poisoning the biosphere . . . . .	[A. Marcer]	304
• Resources that are becoming scarce . . . . .	[A. Marcer]	308
<b>1.4.3 Control of information flows</b> . . . . .		313
The information revolution and informatics . . . . .	[J.M. Camarasa]	313
The substitution of energy by information . . . . .	[R. Margalef]	313
Awareness of the exploitation of the biosphere . . . . .	[J.M. Camarasa]	316
<b>2. The visible biosphere</b> . . . . .		319
<b>2.1 Soil and bioclimate</b> . . . . .	[L. Ferrés, J. Porta and R.M. Poch]	321
<b>2.1.1 The atmosphere on the Earth's surface today</b> . . . . .	[L. Ferrés]	321
<b>2.1.2 Bioclimatic factors</b> . . . . .	[L. Ferrés]	321
Climatic variables . . . . .		321
Types of climate . . . . .		327
The phenomenon of microclimates . . . . .		328
<b>2.1.3 Edaphic factors</b> . . . . .	[J. Porta and R.M. Poch]	330
From rocks to soil . . . . .		330
Soil forming processes . . . . .		334
Soils and vegetation . . . . .		336
Soil nomenclature . . . . .		338
Edaphic models . . . . .		341
The Earth's edaphic mantle . . . . .		344
• From Hippocrates to Hæckel . . . . .	[J.M. Camarasa]	346
<b>2.2 Bioclimatic and edaphic domains: biomes</b> . . . . .	[L. Ferrés]	350
<b>2.2.1 The biome concept</b> . . . . .		350
<b>2.2.2 The world's great biomes</b> . . . . .		350
Tropical forests: humid tropical lands . . . . .		351
Savannahs: the dry tropical lands . . . . .		354
Deserts: the dry lands . . . . .		355
The Mediterranean lands: temperate regions with a dry summer period . . . . .		357
Temperate forests: temperate lands that are neither cold nor dry . . . . .		358
Woodlands: temperate lands with a cold winter and low rainfall . . . . .		359

The steppes and dry prairies . . . . .	360
Boreal coniferous forests or taiga: the cold, wet lands . . . . .	362
• Biomes of asphalt and concrete . . . . . [A. Marcer]	364
The Arctic tundra: frozen boreal lands . . . . .	368
<b>2.2.3 The seas and other “outsiders” . . . . .</b>	<b>369</b>
The Antarctic domain . . . . .	369
The high mountain domain . . . . .	369
Isolated systems: islands, lakes, and caves . . . . .	371
Marine systems . . . . .	372
• From one biome to another: animal migrations . . . . .	374
<b>2.3 The biosphere, a mosaic . . . . . [L. Ferrés]</b>	<b>378</b>
<b>2.3.1 Diversity within biomes . . . . .</b>	<b>378</b>
Variability within biomes . . . . .	378
Microenvironments . . . . .	378
Limits and gradients . . . . .	381
• The perception of the biosphere . . . . . [A. Marcer]	384
<b>2.3.2 Humanized biomes . . . . .</b>	<b>388</b>
Exploited and exploitable ecosystems . . . . .	388
Deliberate and involuntary alterations . . . . .	389
Man’s far-reaching tentacles . . . . .	390
• Protecting areas against the extinction of species . . . . . [A. Marcer]	394
<b>2.3.3 Climatic change: the greenhouse effect . . . . .</b>	<b>398</b>
The hypothesis of a man-made climatic change . . . . .	398
The possible agents of the change . . . . .	398
The possible consequences of climatic change . . . . .	400
Change, Gaia and humans . . . . .	401
• Depletion of the ozone “layer” . . . . . [A. Marcer]	402
 Bibliography . . . . .	 407
 Indexes . . . . .	 413
 Species’ index . . . . .	 415
 Thematic index . . . . .	 421