



What Is Biodiversity?

By James Maclaurin, Kim Sterelny

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In the life sciences, there is wide-ranging debate about biodiversity. While nearly everyone is in favor of biodiversity and its conservation, methods for its assessment vary enormously. So what exactly is biodiversity? Most theoretical work on the subject assumes it has something to do with species richness—with the number of species in a particular region—but in reality, it is much more than that. Arguing that we cannot make rational decisions about what it is to be protected without knowing what biodiversity is, James Maclaurin and Kim Sterelny offer in *What Is Biodiversity?* a theoretical and conceptual exploration of the biological world and how diversity is valued.

Here, Maclaurin and Sterelny explore not only the origins of the concept of biodiversity, but also how that concept has been shaped by ecology and more recently by conservation biology. They explain the different types of biodiversity important in evolutionary theory, developmental biology, ecology, morphology and taxonomy and conclude that biological heritage is rich in not just one biodiversity but many. Maclaurin and Sterelny also explore the case for the conservation of these biodiversities using option value theory, a tool borrowed from economics.

An erudite, provocative, timely, and creative attempt to answer a fundamental question, *What Is Biodiversity?* will become a foundational text in the life sciences and studies thereof.

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What Is Biodiversity? By James Maclaurin, Kim Sterelny Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Review

"Maclaurin and Sterelny's *What Is Biodiversity?* is a truly impressive achievement. The concept of 'biodiversity' is much used though equally abused. Their proposed pluralistic, multidimensional account of biodiversity centered around species richness leads the way forward through studies of diversity in ecology and conservation biology, and also in important areas like paleontology and developmental biology. Anyone interested in debates over biological diversity and its values simply must read this book."—Jay Odenbaugh, Lewis and Clark College

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"*What Is Biodiversity?* is essential reading for philosophers of biology, environmental philosophers, conservation biologists, and, indeed, anyone interested in one of the most pressing issues of our time: the conservation of biodiversity. Maclaurin and Sterelny have written an important book, but it's also a terrific read. The writing is clear and economical, the argumentation is tight, and the result is a very engaging book. It is sure to have a significant impact on both the philosophical and the biological work on biodiversity."—Mark Colyvan, University of Sydney

(Mark Colyvan, University of Sydney)

"This monograph would make an excellent supplemental reading for undergraduate courses in ecology, conservation biology, and philosophy of biology or a primary resource for a class on biodiversity."
(Choice)

Choice Outstanding Academic Title, 2008
(Choice)

"Overall, [the authors] have produced an interesting review and a coherent argument. Their work will be of interest to those involved in conservation planning and management, environmental policy, ecological and evolutionary theory, and the philosophy of biological science. . . . Their work underlines that extension of conservation biology by integration of ecological and evolutionary theory is an exciting, advancing field."
(A. Jasmyn J. Lynch *Austral Ecology*)

"A valuable theoretical contribution to debates surrounding the conservation of biological diversity. By explaining the diversity of diversities and its relevance for conservation purposes, [the authors] correct the widespread illusion that the conservation of species is an easily tractable and objective aim of conservation."
(Uta Esser *International Studies in the Philosophy of Science*)

"This book often clears a path through much of the related theoretical undergrowth, fearlessly criticising the theories of all-comers, Dawkins, Gould and Lewontin among them."
(Robin Attfield *Philosophy*)

About the Author

James Maclaurin is senior lecturer in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Otago in New

Zealand. **Kim Sterelny** divides his time between Victoria University of Wellington, where he is professor of philosophy, and the Research School of Social Sciences at Australian National University. He is the coauthor, with Paul Griffiths, of *Sex and Death: An Introduction to Philosophy of Biology*.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

George Green:

The particular book *What Is Biodiversity?* will bring that you the new experience of reading any book. The author style to spell out the idea is very unique. If you try to find new book to learn, this book very acceptable to you. The book *What Is Biodiversity?* is much recommended to you to see. You can also get the e-book through the official web site, so you can quicker to read the book.

Lawrence Caulfield:

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