



Oxygen: The Molecule that Made the World

Nick Lane

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Three hundred million years ago, dragonflies grew as big as seagulls, with wingspans nearly a yard across. Researchers claim they could have flown only if the air had contained more oxygen than today—probably as much as 35 per cent. But oxygen is a toxic gas. Fruit flies raised at twice the normal level of oxygen live half as long as their siblings. If atmospheric oxygen reached 35 per cent in the Carboniferous, why did oxygen promote exuberant growth, instead of rapid aging and death?

This is just one of the puzzles Nick Lane answers in *Oxygen*. Lane takes the reader on an enthralling journey, as gripping as a thriller, as he unravels the unexpected ways in which oxygen spurred the evolution of life and death. The book explains far more than the size of ancient insects: it shows how oxygen underpins the origin of biological complexity, the birth of photosynthesis, the sudden evolution of animals, the need for two sexes, the accelerated aging of cloned animals like Dolly the sheep, and the surprisingly long lives of bats and birds. Drawing on this grand evolutionary canvas, *Oxygen* offers fresh perspectives on our own lives and deaths, explaining modern killer diseases, why we age, and what we can do about it.

Advancing revelatory new ideas, following chains of evidence, the book ranges through many disciplines, from environmental sciences to molecular medicine. The result is a captivating vision of contemporary science and a humane synthesis of our place in nature. This remarkable book will redefine the way we think about the world.

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