

## PREFACE

This manual has been written especially for the Biology 1309 – **LIFE ON EARTH** course offered at Austin Community College. Although various editions of the *Life on Earth Study Guide* have been available for many years, the study guide was substantially revised in August 1997, May 2001, May 2002, December 2003, May 2006 and again in summer 2007. This manual, *Life on Earth: Concepts and Questions*, is designed to supplement the video programs. We hope you find it a useful tool to guide you through the course.

We are indebted to David Attenborough for his genius in developing this series of programs. We would also like to thank Sarah Strong and D'Maris Allen for their substantial input into this study guide.

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# INTRODUCTION

## I. OVERVIEW

**LIFE ON EARTH** is a self-paced course based on a series of 13 video episodes produced by the BBC and narrated by David Attenborough. This study guide has been written to guide you through the class.

**LIFE ON EARTH** is an evolutionary approach to studying the many life forms on this planet. Beginning with the simplest forms of life, David Attenborough takes you around the world as he examines different living organisms. He explores the different characteristics of living creatures, especially as their bodies become more complex. Throughout the video episodes, he examines many organisms on an individual basis; however, their relationships with other life forms are also noted. As described in his companion book, *Life on Earth*, Attenborough presents the “history of nature” by surveying the changes that occur to major plant and animal groups as they evolve into more complex life forms.

## II. CHANGING NATURE OF SCIENCE

Science is an ever-changing field, particularly with respect to our understanding of evolutionary history. While Attenborough presented the most current evolutionary information available at the time these videos were made, many more discoveries have been made since then. There has been a full-blown Renaissance period of new fossil findings coupled with new information from molecular biology that has shed new light on evolutionary relationships of living things.

In some cases (and sometimes with much argument and figurative blood-shedding), our view of relationships has been radically altered. The “war of birds as living dinosaurs” is still being fought today, with new fossils and interpretations shaking the conventional world of ornithology (study of birds). This is an on-going process. Even as we revise this edition of the study guide, it is with the knowledge that some of the dates and interpretations may change before you even read this. However, this is the nature of science: change based on new evidence.

So, if all videos contain information that is out of date, why do we use them in a distance learning biology class? Well, there are a number of good reasons. First, the basic information in the videos is still valid. The organisms have not changed radically; our interpretation of “who is related to whom” has changed. Secondly, the photography is fantastic and the videos illustrate many of the major issues of evolutionary biology. In some cases, scenes were filmed for the first time and, unfortunately in some cases, for the last time because the organisms are now extinct. Finally, we still feel that, short of going on a trip around the world, this is a great way to see global diversity and put it into its evolutionary context.

### III. COURSE STRUCTURE

The material in this study guide is divided into six units; each unit usually has two video episodes and the corresponding material in the study guide. (The only exception is Unit 5; it contains three video episodes. Be sure and allow extra time for the completion of Unit 5. ) Check your syllabus to see what material is covered on each exam.

Read the material in the study guide (**Concepts**) before watching the video episode. There is additional information on certain issues that will be discussed in the video. As you watch the tape, look for examples of these concepts.

You should then view the video episode and answer the **Questions** in the study guide. Students who have successfully completed this course in the past have told us they typically watch the videos twice. The exam questions are based on **all** material covered in this study guide.

#### WEB LINKS IN THE STUDY GUIDE

The web links in this study guide were correct when the study guide was revised. Since web links change faster than the study guide, please check the ACC Life on Earth web site for updated links. Go to:

<http://www.austincc.edu/bspeer>

and click on the “Life on Earth” link. We will try to keep these links updated. Also, you can go to Google and try searching for the topics.

#### ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

If you need or want additional information about topics covered in this course, don't forget to use the ACC Library. Biology textbooks will have information about characteristics of different groups: bacteria, plants, animals, etc. These books will also contain information about evolution, fossils and related topics.

On reserve at many ACC Libraries, you will find David Attenborough's companion book, *Life on Earth*. His book can be a very valuable resource for students. Ask for help from the instructor or a reference librarian.

Used copies of Attenborough's *Life on Earth* book are often available at on-line book sources and used bookstores. Several students have bought a used book from [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) or [www.barnesandnoble.com](http://www.barnesandnoble.com) in the past. If you have trouble understanding his British accent, the book may be a great help to you.

## IV. COMMON TERMINOLOGY USED THROUGHOUT THE COURSE

**Cells:** smallest complex unit of life. Most cells are complex, with internal subdivisions (called organelles or “small organs”) that carry out biochemical reactions, such as breaking down food particles or transporting substances from one part of the cell to another.

**Tissues:** groups of cells that function together in a multicellular organism to carry out a specific task, such as muscle tissue or nervous tissue or tissue that covers or tissue that connects (such as bone).

**Organs:** complex structures made of two or more tissues that carry out a specific function. One example is the human stomach that contains tissue for secretion, tissue for absorption, muscle tissue for movement, nervous tissue, etc.

**Unicellular:** organisms that consist of only one cell. In some cases, several unicellular organisms group together to form a colony. However, each cell still retains its separate identity and the colony cannot be considered to be a true multicellular organism.

**Multicellular:** an organism that consists of more than one cell. In most multi-cellular organisms, the cells have become specialized for different functions, such as digestion or reproduction. The cells in the organism cannot live in isolation.

**Heterotrophs:** organisms that rely upon other organisms for their supply of food.

**Autotrophs:** organisms that produce their own food from raw materials and an energy source. The most common type of autotrophic production of food on the surface of the earth is **photosynthesis**, the means by which organisms (such as plants) convert water and carbon dioxide into sugars and oxygen, using energy from sunlight. There is mounting evidence that **chemoautotrophs**, organisms that produce food from carbon dioxide and water using inorganic chemical energy (such as sulfides, methane, etc.), may be equally important underground and in the deep sea.

**Herbivore:** an organism that eats autotrophs. One example is a zebra.

**Carnivore:** an organism that eats other heterotrophs, such as a lion.

*Let's look at a specific example of the last few terms. A grass plant is an autotroph, using sunlight to produce food. A zebra is an herbivore that eats grass plants (autotrophs). A lion is a carnivore that eats the herbivore (zebra) that eats the autotrophs (grass plants).*

**Species:** generally used to represent a collection of similar organisms that are capable of interbreeding under natural conditions and producing fertile offspring. One example is the familiar fox squirrel (*Sciurus niger*). Fox squirrels can and will breed with each other but do not breed with gray squirrels (*Sciurus carolinensis*).

**Scientific Nomenclature:** this is a system used in science to group organisms into categories based on similar characteristics.

There are different levels of categories. The following scheme begins with the largest category (based on very broad characteristics) and goes toward the smallest category (based on very specific characteristics). We will use the fox squirrel to illustrate the concept of scientific nomenclature.

Kingdom: Animalia  
 Phylum: Chordata  
 Class: Mammalia  
 Order: Rodentia  
 Family: Sciuridae  
 Genus: *Sciurus*  
 Species: *Sciurus niger*

Each species has its own scientific name. The name is made of two Latin words. All fox squirrels have the scientific name of *Sciurus niger*. All gray squirrels have the scientific name of *Sciurus carolinensis*. Since fox squirrels and gray squirrels are members of the same genus, they are considered to be closely related. Since the second word is different (*niger* versus *carolinensis*), the two types of squirrels belong to different species. This means that they do not mate and produce fertile offspring.

**Population:** a group of individuals of the same species found in one geographic area. For example, all of the blue catfish found in Town Lake would represent a population.

**Community:** composed of all living organisms found in one geographic area. All fish, plants, plankton, algae, turtles and other organisms in Town Lake would be a community.

**Ecosystem:** all living organisms plus all of the physical characteristics of the environment (rainfall, climate, temperate, etc.) The Sahara Desert is an example of an ecosystem.

## V. METRIC SYSTEM

Measurements and distances in the videos are given in both metric and English units. Here are some of the conversion factors.

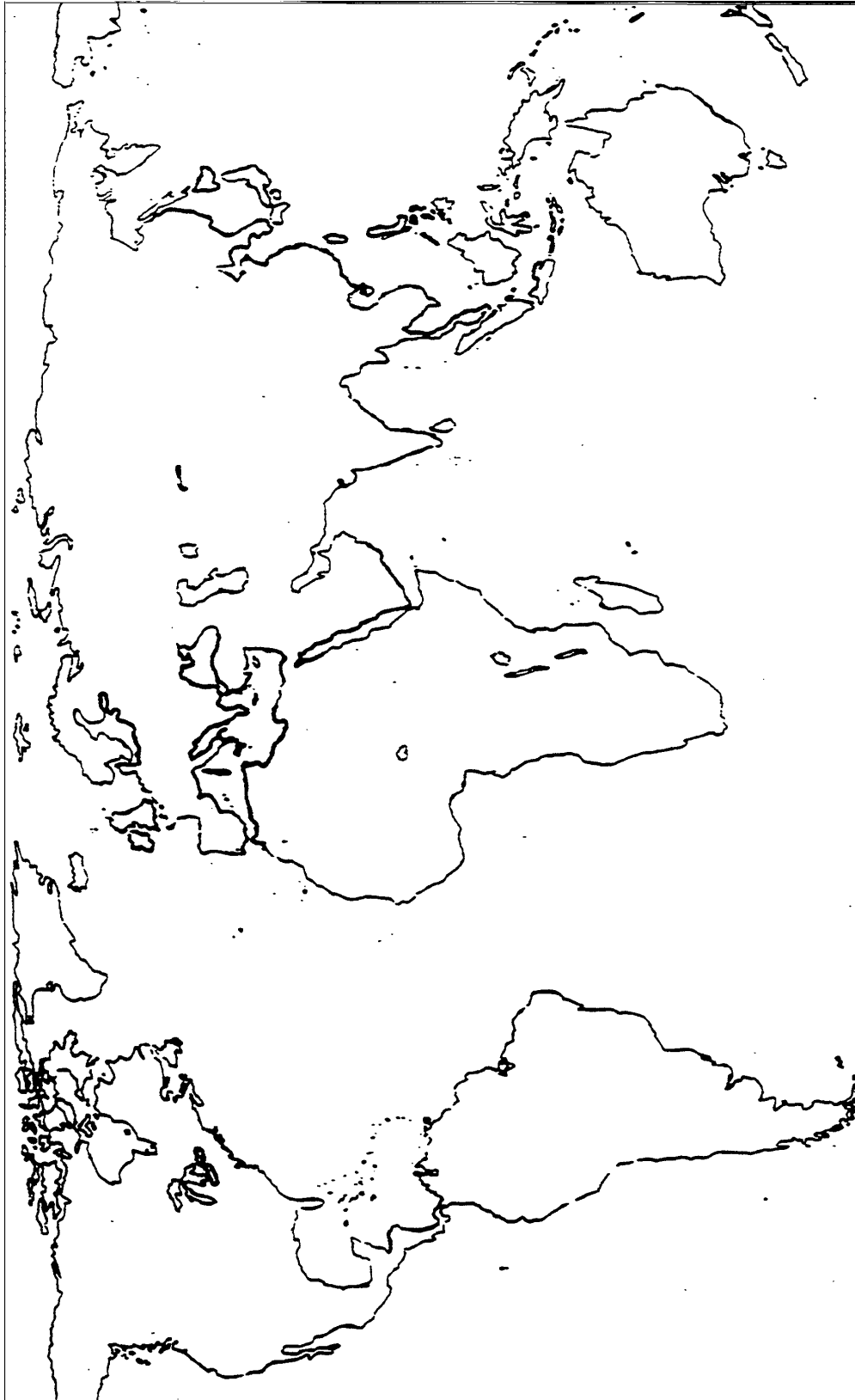
1 mile = 1.6 kilometers	1 kilometer = 0.6 mile
1 mile = 5,280 feet	1 kilometer = 1,000 meters
1 inch = 2.54 centimeters	1 meter = 39 inches or 1.094 yards
1 kilogram = 2.2 pounds	1 meter = 100 centimeters
1 pound = 0.454 kilograms	1 meter = 1,000 millimeters

## Geologic Timescale for Life on Earth

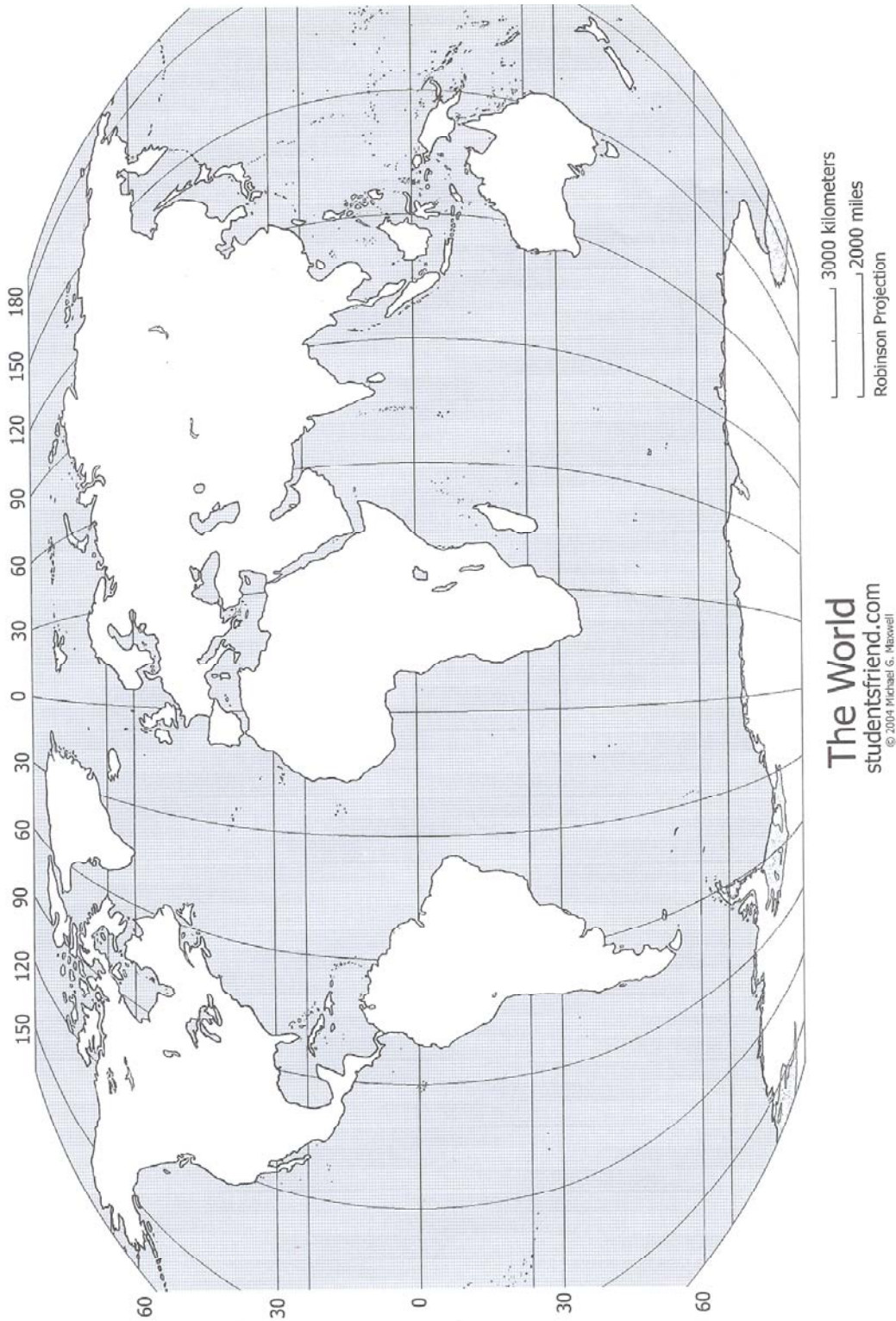
Glacial/Interglacial periods	2 mya to present
Land bridge between North America and South America	5 mya
Spread of grasslands	25 mya
Oldest ape fossil	33 mya
Oldest fossils of monkeys	38 mya
Global Climate cooling and drying	45 mya to present
First appearance of primates, hoofed mammals, rodents	54 mya
1 <sup>st</sup> whale fossils	56 mya
1 <sup>st</sup> bat fossils (teeth)	57 mya
Rapid diversification of mammals (origin of most modern orders)	65-54 mya (if not earlier)
Mass Extinction (dinosaurs, large marine reptiles, ammonites)	65 mya
Oldest monotreme fossil (relative of duck-billed platypus and echidna)	100 mya (poor record)
Oldest fossils of placental and marsupial mammals	100 mya
1 <sup>st</sup> land snail (pulmonate snails) fossils	110 mya
Oldest fossils of ancestral mammals leading to placentals/marsupials	125 mya
1 <sup>st</sup> flowering plants	130 mya
<i>Archaeopteryx</i> fossils	145 mya
Oldest true mammal fossils	170+ mya
1 <sup>st</sup> turtle fossils	180 mya
Oldest frog fossil	190 mya
1 <sup>st</sup> dinosaurs	225 mya
Mass Extinction (including trilobites, primitive corals)	245 mya
Protomammals (synapsids) abundant	300-210 mya
1 <sup>st</sup> flying insect fossils	310? mya
1 <sup>st</sup> amniote fossils (reptiles and protomammals)	330 mya
1 <sup>st</sup> land vertebrate fossils	360 mya
1 <sup>st</sup> seed plant fossils	370 mya
1 <sup>st</sup> insect fossils (springtails)	385 mya
1 <sup>st</sup> centipede and arachnid fossils (and good plants, Rhynie chert)	415 mya
1 <sup>st</sup> jawed fish fossils	425 mya
1 <sup>st</sup> plant fossils	430 mya
1 <sup>st</sup> land plants (based on spores)	470 mya
1 <sup>st</sup> vertebrates	515 mya
Cambrian "Explosion" (low animal diversity to high animal diversity)	525-510 mya
Most modern phyla appear in fossil record (molluscs, brachiopods, arthropods, echinoderms, annelids, chordates)	544-510 mya
Diverse (but unusual) metazoans (animals with true tissues, including Vendian biota with sponges and jellyfish)	600-544 mya
Oldest multicellular fossils (sponges?)	700 mya
Diverse single celled Eukaryotic fossils	1.1 bya
Oldest Eukaryotic fossils	1.7 bya
Stromatolites abundant	2.8-1.3 bya
Accumulation of oxygen (O <sub>2</sub> ) in atmosphere	2.6-1.7 bya
Oldest Prokaryotic fossils (Australia)	3.5 bya
1 <sup>st</sup> evidence of biologic activity (based on stable isotopes)	3.8 bya
Earth forms	4.5-4.6 bya

**mya = millions of years ago bya = billions of years ago**

Blank Map of the World (Figure 1)



Blank Map of the World (Figure 2)



<http://www.studentsfriend.com/aids/curraids/maps/maps.html>

**Blank Map of the World (Figure 3)**

