

PREFACE

Welcome to the Oxford Biology Primers

There has never been a more exciting time to be a biologist. Not only do we understand more about the biological world than ever before, but we're using that understanding in ever more creative and valuable ways.

Our understanding of the way our genes work is being used to explore new ways to treat disease; our understanding of ecosystems is being used to explore more effective ways to protect the diversity of life on Earth; and our understanding of plant science is being used to explore more sustainable ways to feed a growing human population.

The repeated use of the word 'explore' here is no accident. The study of biology is, at heart, an exploration. We have written the Oxford Biology Primers to encourage you to explore biology for yourself—to find out more about what scientists at the cutting edge of the subject are researching, and the biological problems they're trying to solve.

Throughout the series, we use a range of features to help you see topics from different perspectives.

Scientific approach panels help you understand a little more about 'how we know what we know'—that is, the research that has been carried out to reveal our current understanding of the science described in the text, and the methods and approaches scientists have used when carrying out that research.

Case studies explore how a particular concept is relevant to our everyday life, or provide an intimate picture of one aspect of the science described.

The bigger picture panels help you think about some of the issues and challenges associated with the topic under discussion—for example, ethical considerations, or wider impacts on society.

More than anything, however, we hope this series will reveal to you, its readers, that biology is awe-inspiring, both in its variety and its intricacy, and will drive you forward to explore the subject further for yourself.