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Ecology has long been shaped by ideas that stress the sharing of resources and the competition for those resources, and by the assumption that populations and communities typically exist under equilibrium conditions in habitats saturated with both individuals and species. However, much evidence contradicts these assumptions and it is likely that nonequilibrium is much more widespread than might be expected. This book is unique in focusing on nonequilibrium aspects of ecology, providing evidence for nonequilibrium and equilibrium in populations (and metapopulations), in extant communities and in ecological systems over evolutionary time, including nonequilibrium due to recent and present mass extinctions. The assumption that competition is of overriding importance is central to equilibrium ecology, and much space is devoted to its discussion. As communities of some taxa appear to be shaped more by competition than others, an attempt is made to find an explanation for these differences.

Cover illustration: coral reefs are among the most diverse ecosystems on earth. An important question discussed in this book is the importance of equilibrium and nonequilibrium conditions in such systems. The photo shows *Clathria mima* (Porifera, Poecilosclerida), an encrusting sponge living amongst the highly diverse cryptic coral reef communities of the Indo-west Pacific. Truk Lagoon, Federated States of Micronesia, at 15m depth. Photograph by J.N.A. Hooper, Queensland Museum, Brisbane, Australia.

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