

As the summer sun rises slowly over the plains of Canada, its rays strike a dragonfly perched on the seed head of a grass plant. Warming quickly, the dragonfly soon takes flight for a day of feeding on insects flying over the prairie. As a larva, the dragonfly spent a year feeding and growing in the shallows of the river that flows behind the screen of trees over which the sun rose this morning. After its year of larval life, the dragonfly transformed from its creeping aquatic stage, into the colorful flying form that now soars and dives over the prairie like a miniature falcon.

When the dragonfly moved from the river to the nearby prairie, it took a small amount of nutrients with it, forging a link between river and prairie as it moved materials against the pull of gravity to the uplands. The dragonfly will transport nutrients back to the river when it returns to reproduce. These nutrients will be ones taken up by plants from prairie soils and consumed by insects on which the dragonfly now preys.

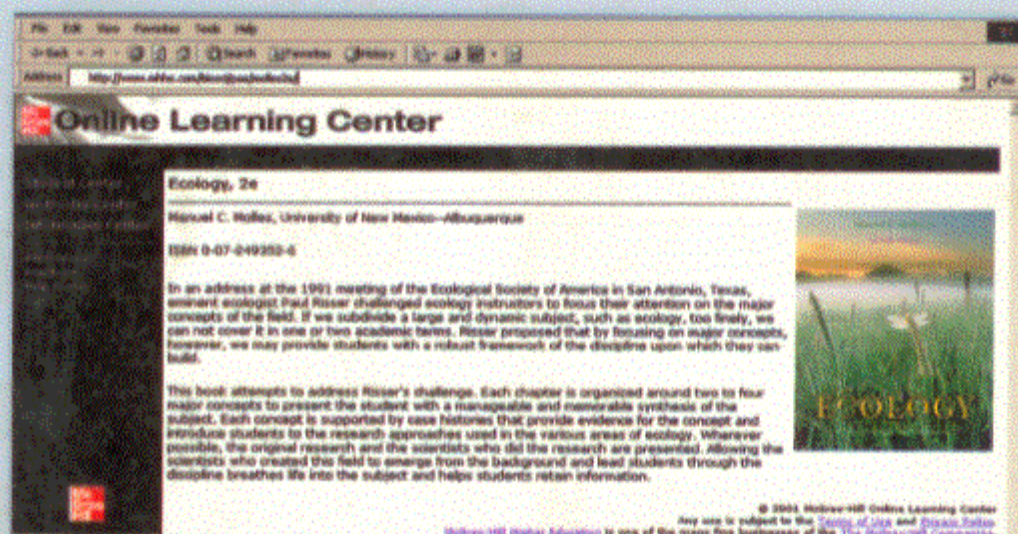
Studies of the relationships between organisms and their environment, over distances and time, large and small, make up the science we call ecology. This book was written to introduce this complex and fascinating discipline, and to provide a conceptual foundation that will prepare the reader to look out onto a prairie or other landscape, and see the broad outlines of the intricate connections weaving all living beings and their environments on this planet into a vast web of ecological interactions.

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