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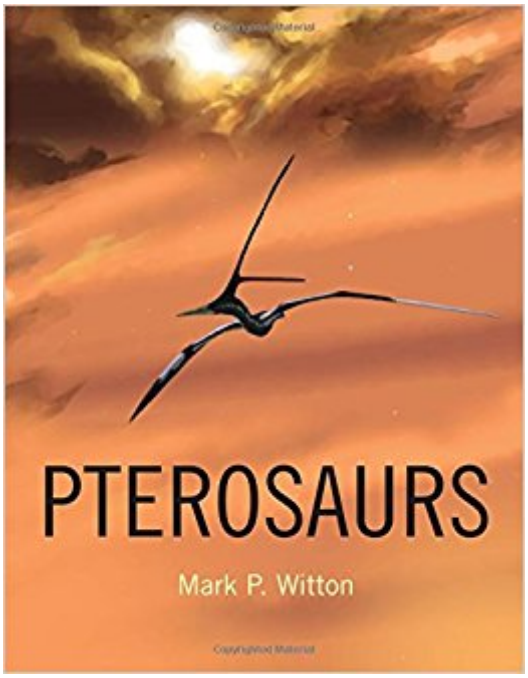
Pterosaurs: Natural History, Evolution, Anatomy



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Synopsis

For 150 million years, the skies didn’t belong to birds--they belonged to the pterosaurs. These flying reptiles, which include the pterodactyls, shared the world with the nonavian dinosaurs until their extinction 65 million years ago. Some pterosaurs, such as the giant azhdarchids, were the largest flying animals of all time, with wingspans exceeding thirty feet and standing heights comparable to modern giraffes. This richly illustrated book takes an unprecedented look at these astonishing creatures, presenting the latest findings on their anatomy, ecology, and extinction. Pterosaurs features some 200 stunning illustrations, including original paintings by Mark Witton and photos of rarely seen fossils. After decades of mystery, paleontologists have finally begun to understand how pterosaurs are related to other reptiles, how they functioned as living animals, and, despite dwarfing all other flying animals, how they managed to become airborne. Here you can explore the fossil evidence of pterosaur behavior and ecology, learn about the skeletal and soft-tissue anatomy of pterosaurs, and consider the newest theories about their cryptic origins. This one-of-a-kind book covers the discovery history, paleobiogeography, anatomy, and behaviors of more than 130 species of pterosaur, and also discusses their demise at the end of the Mesozoic. The most comprehensive book on pterosaurs ever published Features some 200 illustrations, including original paintings by the author Covers every known species and major group of pterosaurs Describes pterosaur anatomy, ecology, behaviors, diversity, and more Encourages further study with 500 references to primary pterosaur literature

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Customer Reviews

"A comprehensive introduction. . . . Witton manages to make this an attractive book for the layperson and bring these flying fossils to life."--Natural History"Witton's new tribute to pterosaurs gives these fantastic fossil creatures a much-needed makeover in two crucial ways. Not only does the book bring the science of pterosaurs up to date--at long last following-up other classics such as David Unwin's The Pterosaurs and Peter Wellenhofer's Illustrated Encyclopedia of Pterosaurs--but Witton is a highly-skilled and imaginative artist who ably reconstructs the bones of the animals and brings them back to life in startling poses. Witton's pterosaurs are fantastical creatures deserving their own time in the spotlight. . . . Witton's combination of style and substance makes Pterosaurs a true treasure and an absolute must for anyone curious about the extinct flyers."--Brian Switek, National Geographic.com"This really is the ultimate guide to pterosaurs, providing us with a richer view of pterosaur diversity and behaviour than allowed in the two previous great volumes on the group (Wellnhofer 1991, Unwin 2005) and containing a substantial amount of review and analysis of pterosaur ecology and functional morphology."--Darren Naish, Scientific American"A solid review of the whole of the Pterosauria that'll be genuinely useful for researchers for many years. I'm sure I'll be typing 'Witton, (2013) stated . . .' quite a lot in the future and that, if anything, should be a good measure of how I rate this as a scientific text. Now go buy a copy and read it, it really is very good."--Dave Hone, Pterosaur.Net"[Witton] presents the uncertainties of science but never shies away from making his opinion clear. [He] respects the complexities [of scientific writing] without allowing them to clump up the text. . . . I can wholeheartedly recommend the book already."--David Mass, DRIP"Pterosaurs would make an excellent addition to any reference collection and especially that of an advanced (adult or young adult) lay-reader."--Greg Leitich Smith, GSL Blog"I can tell you that it is not only a fascinating bit of text, its illustrations will leave you gaping in awestruck amazement."--John E. Riutta, Well-read Naturalist"[Witton] combines his deep knowledge of the subject as a palaeontologist at the University of Portsmouth (U.K.) with his skills as an artist, and he has a flair for informal but accurate writing. His 292-page book is the most comprehensive and authoritative book to come along since Peter Wellnhofer's classic Illustrated Encyclopedia of Pterosaurs back in 1991."--James Gurney, artist and author of the Dinotopia book series"The joy of Pterosaurs is how it brings long extinct animals to life."--Jeff Hecht, New Scientist"Learn all about flying reptiles in this artfully illustrated overview of pterosaur research."--Science News"Highly recommended."--EverythingDinosaur.com"Once dragons flew through Mesozoic skies! They were pterosaurs, and Witton offers a rich and extensive account of what science knows about these extinct creatures. . . . For those who want an introduction to flying reptiles or the craft of scientific

research, this title is a great choice."--Eileen H. Kramer, Library Journal"Beautifully laid out, clearly written, loaded with handsome illustrations, Witton’s book invites you to dip in for delicious tidbits or hunker down for the equivalent of a superb lecture series."--Wilson’s Bookmarks, Christianity Today"This is a book of impeccable scholarship, but it is also very readable for the non-scholar and amateur pterosaurophile. . . . A wonderful book!"--Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh, Middleburgh Blog"Though the writing style clearly targets the book to nonexperts, it does not dilute its realized value for professional paleontologists or teachers of paleontology. This is a very skillful presentation: a brief introductory paragraph or two leads quickly into an advanced discussion. The illustrations are excellent, including nice reconstructions by the author and very high-quality photographic reproductions of original key fossils. Overall, this is a very well-done book that belongs in any library with a vertebrate paleontology collection."--Choice"Although the text is mostly technical, directed at an informed audience, it is written with a humorous slant. Everyone will get something out of reading this book. . . . This is a fantastic book!"--Randy Lauff, Canadian Field Naturalist"Witton’s Pterosaurs is a remarkable visual feast, packed full of novel art as well as excellent photographs that the author clearly worked hard to obtain. There are, in fact, illustrations of some sort on virtually every single page--you will never get bored of looking at this book. . . . If you like or are even vaguely interested in pterosaurs, you really need this book."--Darren Naish, Historical Biology

"This book is both academically interesting and truly fun to read. That is a difficult balance to reach, but Witton does an excellent job of it by using a lighthearted, informal writing style in combination with a well-referenced, serious scientific review. An invaluable reference."--Michael Habib, University of Southern California

Most dinosaur picture books and encyclopedic guides barely cover the pterosaurs (except perhaps the pteronodon) for the obvious reason that they are not dinosaurs. I finally decided I wanted to know more about these incredible creatures of the sky.And boy, this is a gem of a book - anything and everything you wanted to know and dared to ask is in this book. Beginning with a general introduction into paleontogoly, and covering in some scientific detail the work historically and presently the various genera of these flying reptiles. Almost all of the entries for each species has an artists impression and frequently a skeletal view. It also provides for each species such information as the size, where and how it was found, the ecology (what it fed on), and its flight capabilties.In short - this is possibly the best book ever written so far on this subject, accessible to the inquisitive amateur and useful for the budding paleontogoligal student.

Pterosaurs are one of my favourite groups of prehistoric animals, and as such it is great to see an entire book devoted to them. I am also familiar with Peter Wellnofer's pterosaur book from 1991, which is quite good but has grown somewhat outdated over the years. Mark Witton's pterosaur book gives the reader the current up to date info on these fascinating flying creatures.Witton demolishes old myths about the pterosaurs, such as the myth that pterosaurs were primarily seabird analogues, the myth that pterosaurs were poor flyers, and the myth that pterosaurs were out-competed by birds.The earlier chapters focus on such matters as pterosaur origins and their anatomy, physiology and lifestyles. I especially liked the parts about pterosaur flight such as the incredibly effective quadrupedal launching methods pterosaurs used.The book then goes on to showing all the different known pterosaur groups, explaining in detail their defining characteristics and what many different researchers have deduced about how these pterosaurs lived. Some pterosaur groups have been discovered only fairly recently, such as the boreopterids. Some are still poorly understood, especially the lonchodectids whose exact appearances let alone lifestyles remain somewhat of a mystery.The book is beautifully illustrated with pterosaur pictures drawn by Witton himself. There are both pictures of pterosaurs in their natural environments, sometimes together with other creatures, and pictures of pterosaurs in profile. Interestingly, each profile picture shows the pterosaur in question launching, giving a good idea of how this could have looked. There are also many photos of fossils, plus numerous useful diagrams.I am glad to have bought this book and would recommend it to anyone with an interest in pterosaurs, or in prehistoric life in general.

Before reading this book I knew almost nothing about pterosaurs but now I see them for the amazing, ecologically diverse creatures they were--an experiment with vertebrate flight that produced all sorts of interesting parallels with birds. I'm a professional paleontologist, so for me the discussion of bones and taxonomy is no barrier. But like many readers, I expect, the most interesting parts of this lovely book lie in the discussions of paleoecology, the controversies in `pterosaurology' and the fuzzy, still emerging vision of an alternate world of flying animals. Witton is a good writer--witty, a bit informal, and an expert with a skill at telling a story well. For me, it is a perfect combination of wit and fact; I can gloss over the bone names and inside-controversy if I want to glean the meat of how the animals worked and what their world was like. His descriptions of these animals as living things are not particularly technical and should be accessible to an general reader. People who know something about birds will likely particularly enjoy this book. But, increasingly as I read each chapter while brushing my teeth or sitting on the pot, I have taken to

absorbing it all. Indeed, I have taken to comparing this book very favorably to other works of this kind, such as Long's "The Rise of Fishes" (much more taxonomic than it should be) and similar books that survey major groups. Three cheers for Mark Witton!Witton is also a good illustrator, and has put flesh, color, and speculative reality on his pterosaurs. The book is illustrated with lots of paintings, some of which are a bit more artistic than fully informative, but which give you a sense (in an `informed-speculation' way) of what these animals were like as living things. He also has lovely photographs of the actual specimens and anatomical drawings of the skeletons and other features of each group of pterosaurs. It is handy to have the photographs in this book since they help me appreciate how scrappy a lot of the fossil material actually is. That realization, in turn, tempers one's acceptance of the fully fleshed-out paintings and skeletal drawings.Still, there is enough there (amazingly, for such delicate creatures) that we gain a sense for just how diverse and incredible pterosaurs were as a group. There were flamingo-like pterosaurs, nightjar-like pterosaurs, and albatross-like pterosaurs. There were pterosaurs with huge, likely brightly colored crests, and ones with scimitar-wings and broad-rounded wings. The emerging image is of a group with huge diversity that has explored many of the same alleyways as birds. At the same time, pterosaurs were also not just an early try at being birds, since they seem to have many unique features of their ecology. Pterosaurs went in for a huge variety of head crests--massive, elaborate affairs that provided an alternative way to impress mates compared to peacock's tails. Their mouths were crammed with baskets of teeth--a distinctly un-bird-like approach to life. Further, many pterosaurs had dinky tails that seemingly must have given them oddly unbalanced bodies considering their long necks and big heads. Just how did these animals fly without nose-diving into the ground? It is unfortunate that we have just a few scraps of them in the fossil record, but what a record it is turning out to be! Glorious diversity, most wonderful!

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