recovered DNA sequence, from a mammoth, stands at a more cautious, although still remarkable, one million years old (T. van der Valk *et al. Nature* **591**, 265–269; 2021). In the three decades since *Jurassic Park*, the field has tried to distance itself from de-extinction and dinosaurs in a quest for credibility, shifting its focus to other headline-grabbing topics including human origins and prehistory. Nonetheless, Jones argues, that first quagga paper set the template for ancient-DNA research: newsworthy studies, published in 'top-tier' journals.

Jones's interviewees are frank about the extent to which media attention sets their research agenda. They often choose charismatic subject matter and species, thinking these carry weight with funders and journal editors. Who, asks one researcher, "cares about *Arabidopsis*?!". (Answer: all of us, given that the tiny brassica is a workhorse of genetics and plant science.)

I suspect Jones is concerned that her characterization won't go down well with her interviewees, aware that celebrity is often equated to superficiality. She needn't worry: cognoscenti will be having far too much fun guessing which researcher said what, about whom, among the frank and often witty quotations ("That's some of my best material," a colleague told me, bemoaning their anonymity). Jones is at pains to stress that these media skills are a good thing, propelling the field forward.

She judges success by the same inward-looking lights as her interviewees – funding, top-tier papers and 'impact' are good for careers, but are they good for science? In charting the history of this relatively young field that has developed in tandem with metric- and impact-led agendas in academia, Jones's book provides a window into how these shape (and maybe narrow) research that is relevant to us all, not just a 'celebrity science' such as ancient DNA.

As a 'celebrity', it seems only fitting that ancient DNA should get its own funny, revealing biography before it turns 50. So what is next? The growth and success of ancient-DNA research means that it is no longer a coherent field, so much as a tool used by other disciplines, and better for it. Its technical limits are still being pushed, and there's growing attention to other ancient biomolecules, such as RNA and proteins. At the same time, increasingly credible reports of remarkable biomolecular preservation in fossils tens of millions of years old, including dinosaurs, are being published.

Will the ancient-DNA big-hitters go back in time once more? The latest film in the franchise, *Jurassic World Dominion*, premieres in June; perhaps we'll find out.

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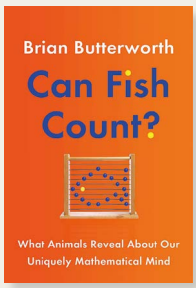
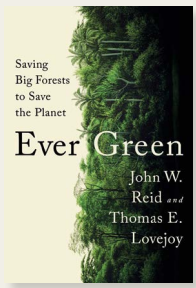
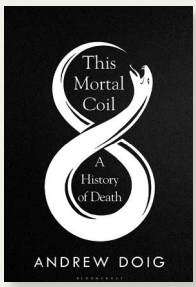
Books in brief



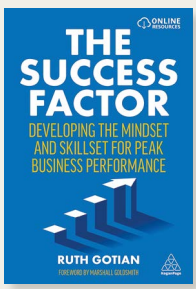
Can Fish Count?
Brian Butterworth *Quercus* (2022)
Whales make amazing journeys between their foraging and breeding grounds, as do fish, turtles, birds and even invertebrates. All measure distance to keep track of their location and how to return by the shortest route. These computations must involve numbers, argues cognitive neuropsychologist Brian Butterworth — although the process is far from understood. His densely detailed but remarkably clear exploration, illuminated by fascinating experiments, maps our understanding of numeration in the animal kingdom.



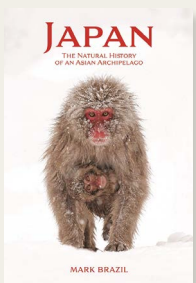
Ever Green
John W. Reid & Thomas E. Lovejoy *W. W. Norton* (2022)
Earth's five largest intact forests are the focus of this heartfelt survey by the conservationist John Reid and Thomas Lovejoy, who is credited with founding climate-change biology. The Taiga runs from the Pacific Ocean across Russia and northern Europe. The North American boreal extends from Alaska to Canada's Atlantic coast. The other three are in the Amazon, the Congo and New Guinea. Their protection from industrial development — aided by their inhabitants, who vividly people this book — is key to halting increases in global temperature.



This Mortal Coil
Andrew Doig *Bloomsbury* (2022)
"Science is why we now live in the healthiest and wealthiest period that we have ever had," writes biochemist Andrew Doig in his history of death, from earliest times to COVID-19. Much of it concerns killer diseases, such as plague, cholera and smallpox, but part covers human behaviour, including farming, famine, violence and accidents. It foresees a future in which 60-year-olds routinely receive new sets of biomedically engineered organs. Impressively wide-ranging and appealingly written.



The Success Factor
Ruth Gotian *Kogan Page* (2022)
In her book on success, leadership coach Ruth Gotian interviews and quotes some 60 leaders, largely in the United States. Their fields cover the armed forces, business, education, law, politics, science, show business, space flight and sport; four are Nobel laureates in science and nine are Olympic champions. She seeks attitudes they share, and identifies four: intrinsic motivation, perseverance, strong foundation and tendency to embrace learning through informal means. All "love what they do and would do it for free if they could".



Japan
Mark Brazil *Princeton Univ. Press* (2022)
Japan's more than 6,000 islands span 3,000 kilometres, from Okinawa in the southwest to Hokkaido in the northeast, and exceed Germany in area. Each spring, as part of the custom of *hanami*, the Japan Meteorological Agency charts the cherry-blossom front moving up the archipelago. The country hosts earthquakes, volcanoes and unusual species of bear, crane, dragonfly, eagle, frog, monkey and snake. All enliven this gloriously illustrated, deeply informed introduction by naturalist Mark Brazil, who lives in Hokkaido. **Andrew Robinson**

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