

## Contents

Preface	<i>page</i> xv
Acknowledgements	xviii
Further Reading	xxi
Introduction	1
1 The Anthropocene and the Earth System	11
Defining the Anthropocene	11
The Earth System	14
The Anthropocene and the Earth System	19
The Anthropocene Defaunation	22
History Is Important	26
2 A Short Detour: The Fossil Record and the Geological Time Scale	29
Limitations of the Fossil Record	29
Biodiversity	33
Origination and Extinction	35
Extinction, Origination, and the Geological Time Scale	38
Recognising Origination and Extinction in the Fossil Record	42
The Sepkoski Data Set and the Beginning of Modern Extinction Studies	44
3 The Origin of Animals and the Emergence of the Earth System	49
Introduction	49
Brachina Creek	49
The Ediacara Fauna	55
The Cambrian Explosion	61

xii CONTENTS

The Deep History of Oxygen	65
The Earth System Emerges	75
4 Documenting Ancient Biodiversity	76
Introduction	76
First Attempts	77
Sepkoski 1984 – A Classic Study	79
Better Data Sets, More Uncertainty?	89
Bring on the Supercomputers	94
5 Mass Extinctions: The Basics	99
The Restaurant at the End of the Cretaceous	99
What Exactly Is a Mass Extinction?	103
How Big Are the ‘Big Five’, and How Do We Know That?	108
Cycles of Extinction	114
The Rise and Fall of Nemesis	120
Mass Extinctions and the Earth System	122
6 Causes of the End-Permian and End-Cretaceous	
Extinction Events	125
Introduction	125
The End-Permian Mass Extinction	128
The Siberian Traps	134
The End-Cretaceous Mass Extinction	139
A More Formal Introduction	141
More on the Meteorite	143
An Accident Waiting to Happen	146
7 Time Heals All: Recovering from a Mass Extinction	159
Replacing Species	159
Ecosystem Recovery	163
Earth System Succession	167

## CONTENTS    xiii

8	The Late Quaternary Megafaunal Extinctions	169
	The Youngest Mass Extinction?	169
	Small Island Extinctions	175
	Continental Extinctions – A Confusion of Causes	176
	Dating Problems	178
	A Meteorite (or Comet) Did It	181
	Humans Did It	184
	Climate Did It	186
	Humans Plus Climate Equals Extinction?	190
9	Surviving the Anthropocene	193
	Are We There Yet?	193
	What If We Did Nothing?	199
	The Resilience of the Earth System	202
	Living and Dying in the Margin of Error	208
	Appendix 1: The Geological Time Scale	211
	Appendix 2: How Long Will It Take to Count to 1 Million?	
	A Rough Guide	213
	Further Reading	215
	Index	237