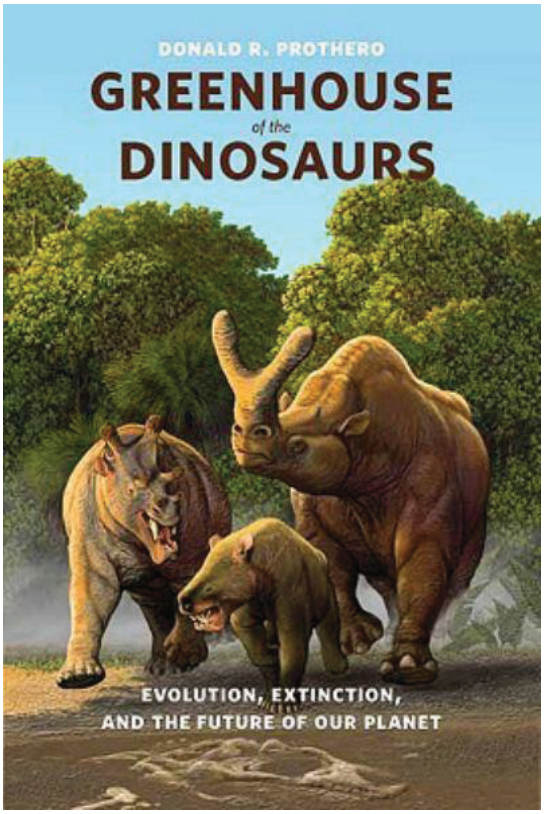
Book reviews



A review of Prothero, D.R. 2009. *Greenhouse of the Dinosaurs: Evolution, Extinction and the Future of our Planet*. Columbia University Press, New York, NY. 288 pp. ($23.60 cloth with 20% PS discount.)

By Benjamin Burger (Utah State University)

Donald Prothero's book "Greenhouse of the Dinosaurs" is a lovely gem of a book that explores the personal and professional career of one of today's most prolific workers in our field. Prothero writes "This book is my own attempt to inject the human side of the profession into the story of the research topics I have had the great fortune to be involved in over the past 40 years." The research topics covered in the book are the same that have established Prothero's career centering on his brilliant work on the Eocene-Oligocene boundary, which occupies five of the ten chapters of the book. These chapters are the heart of the book, and give the reader a true sense of his extraordinary dedication to paleontology. Throughout the book, we are reminded of the singular mindset required for a successful career in paleontology, the dedication and long years of study, and also the sporadic good fortune of finding those elusive remnants of ancient life we all seek. Many illustrious names of paleontologists and geologists grace the book, and Prothero outlines the influence these people had on his own studies. The book touches upon Prothero's career from a fourth-grade dinosaur enthusiast in southern California and his undergraduate education at the University of California at Riverside, to his NSF fellowship at Columbia University in New York and his experiences as a student of the late Malcolm McKenna at the American Museum of Natural History. The story skips through the struggles of finding early employment, teaching at Vassar College and Knox College, before finding permanent employment at Occidental College in California, where he has mentored numerous undergraduate students. Donald Prothero is known to most of us as an enthusiastic listener, having attended every annual meeting of the Society Vertebrate Paleontology and the Paleontological Society at GSA since 1977/78. Perhaps what I admire the most in this lovely gem of a book is the final chapter, in which Prothero offers the frank talk, that we have all heard before, but is rarely put into print—it is hard to find employment as a paleontologist. Few succeed. One in ten PhD graduates finds a job in paleontology, and with the current economic depression, continued closures of paleontology and geology programs, and drop in science literacy among elected officials, it is likely even fewer now. Hope undoubtedly triumphs in the end, as he highlights the importance of paleontology in unlocking the historical nature of climate change and forecasting future changes that are yet to come. He ends with the following statement "Yes, becoming a paleontologist is a difficult task with long odds, but if you love fossils the way I do, the rewards are worth it." Surely the reward of reading this book is worth it as well.