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The idea of a balance of nature has been a dominant part of Western philosophy since before Aristotle, and it persists in the public imagination and even among some ecologists today. In this lively and thought-provoking book, John Kricher demonstrates that nature in fact is not in balance, nor has it ever been at any stage in Earth's history. He explains how and why this notion of a natural world in balance has endured for so long, and he shows why, in these times of extraordinary human influence on the planet's ecosystems, it is critical that we accept and understand that evolution is a fact of life, and that ecology is far more dynamic than we ever imagined.

The Balance of Nature traces the fascinating history of the science of ecology and evolutionary biology, from the discipline's early innovators to the advent of Darwin and evolution, to the brilliant and inquisitive scientific minds of today. Blending insights and entertaining stories from his own remarkable life in science, Kricher reveals how evolution is a powerful engine that drives ecological change, how nature is constantly in flux and, in effect, quite naturally out of balance--and how notions to the contrary are misguided and ultimately hazardous to us all.

The Balance of Nature forcefully argues that an understanding of the dynamic nature of ecology and evolution is essential to formulating policies of environmental ethics to guide humanity toward a more responsible stewardship of our planet's ecosystems.