

Prothero Extended Biography

Donald R. Prothero was born on February 21, 1954, in Glendale, California. His parents were Clifford R. Prothero (1920-2004), a technical illustrator for Lockheed, and Shirley M. (McDonald) Prothero (born 1924), an artist and homemaker. Except for two years spent in Sunnyvale, California (1960-1962) when his father was transferred to Lockheed Sunnyvale, Donald Prothero grew up in the Verdugo Woodlands neighborhood of north Glendale. He was hooked on dinosaurs and prehistoric life at an early age, and knew he wanted to be a paleontologist at age 4. He began playing trombone in 1966, and was active in bands, orchestras, jazz ensembles, and brass ensembles for many years. After graduating from Glendale High School (1972), he went to the University of California Riverside (1972-1976), where he double-majored in both geology and biology, with almost a third major in classics. He studied paleontology under Dr. Michael O. Woodburne and Dr. Michael Murphy, and his senior paleontology thesis was published in the university's undergraduate journal. He earned Phi Beta Kappa as a junior (1975) and graduated *summa cum laude* in 1976, receiving the College Award for outstanding senior in the Natural and Agricultural Sciences. He received all his graduate education at Columbia University and the American Museum of Natural History in New York, studying under Dr. Malcolm C. McKenna. He earned a M.A. in 1978, an M.Phil. 1979, and a Ph.D. in 1982, with a thesis testing the isochroneity of biostratigraphic events in White River Group mammals against the magnetic stratigraphy of those same beds. He also published on late Jurassic mammals and lizards and on other topics before completing his doctorate.

While still in graduate school, he taught sedimentary geology and paleontology as a sabbatical replacement at Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, New York (1979-1981). His first full-time job was at Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois (1982-1985), but he left after three years because his department was shut down and his position eliminated. Since 1985 he has taught physical geology, earth history, sedimentary geology, and paleontology at Occidental College in Los Angeles, California. He has also taught paleontology at the California Institute of Technology.

Prothero's research has focused on three main areas: (1) the evolution of hoofed mammals, especially rhinos, camels, peccaries, and horses; (2) the climate changes of the Eocene-Oligocene transition, 40-24 million years ago; and (3) the magnetostratigraphic dating of fossil-bearing deposits around the world. In the first area, he has edited volumes on the evolution of odd-toed hoofed mammals (perissodactyls, such as horses, rhinos, tapirs and their extinct relatives) and on the evolution of even-toed hoofed mammals (artiodactyls, such as cattle, pigs, peccaries, camels, deer, antelope, and their relatives), as well as a trade book on hoofed mammal evolution. In the second area, he has edited books on the magnetic stratigraphy of the Eocene-Oligocene transition, as well as trade books and technical volumes on the biological changes of the Eocene and Oligocene. In the third area, he edited a volume on magnetic dating of the Cenozoic marine deposits of the Pacific Coast, as well as over 100 published papers on magnetostratigraphic dating of deposits from Cretaceous to Pleistocene in North America, South America, and Asia.

Prothero has also done research and published books on the topic of evolution, and has been actively involved in the evolution-creation debates since the early 1980s. He has also published extensively on mass extinctions, and on the topic of climate change, not

only during the Eocene and Oligocene but also recent global climate change. He is also the author of five leading geology textbooks in physical geology, historical geology, paleontology, sedimentary geology, and stratigraphy.

Donald Prothero has received numerous professional awards, including the Schuchert Medal (outstanding paleontologist under the age of 40) in 1991, a Guggenheim fellowship (1988-1989), Fellow of the Linnean Society (1987), Paleontological Society (2004), and the Geological Society of America (1997). Since 1983, he has received numerous grants to support his research from the National Science Foundation and the Petroleum Research Fund of the American Chemical Society. He has served in numerous professional posts, including President (2011-2012) and Vice-President (2001-2002) of the Pacific Section of the Society of Sedimentary Geology (SEPM), Chair of the Program Committee of the Society of Vertebrate Paleontology (1998-2003), and on many committees for the Geological Society of America and the Paleontological Society. He has served as Associate or Technical Editor of the journals *Geology*, *Journal of Paleontology*, and *Paleobiology*, as well as the Editorial Board of *Skeptic* magazine and the *New Mexico Museum of Natural History Bulletin*.

His books have received numerous awards, including the AAP outstanding book in earth science in 2007 (*Evolution: What the Fossils Say and Why it Matters*), and the *Choice* outstanding science book of 1995 (*The Eocene-Oligocene Transition: Paradise Lost*). His research on stasis and lack of response to climate change in mammals from the Eocene, Oligocene and Pleistocene was extensively cited by Stephen Jay Gould in support of the punctuated equilibrium model of evolution, and he called Prothero “the best punctuated equilibrium researcher on the West Coast”. Prothero’s work on

documenting evolutionary history of fossil vertebrates was cited by Richard Dawkins. Skeptic Society founder Michael Shermer called his 2007 evolution book, “The best damned book on evolution—period!”