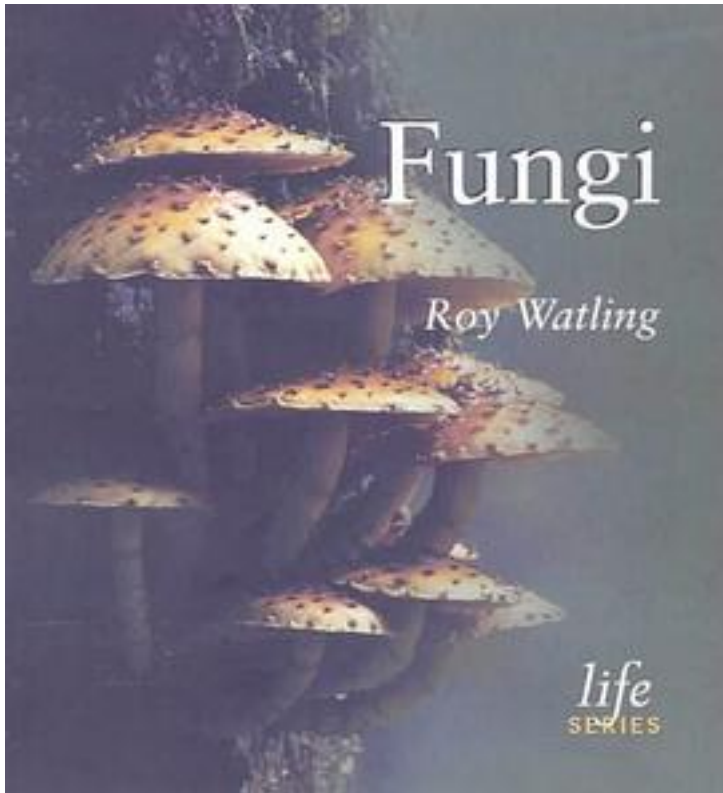


Fungi



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Designed as a resource for botanists and all those interested in fungi, and suitable for the general reader or student looking for background reading, the focus of this text is the larger fungi; those which have an obvious fruiting body. Roy Watling MBE, a respected mycologist who has written widely on the subject of fungi, sheds light on these intriguing organisms in a clear, accessible text illustrated with colour photographs on every page. In a world without fungi, all the fallen trees, dead leaves, animal remains and other detritus would accumulate until the surface of the planet

resembled a vast refuse tip, with little room for living things to exist. The job of breaking down organic materials and recycling the component molecules back into the environment is just one of the essential roles of fungi. Once regarded as simple plants, they are now thought of as a separate kingdom, having diverted from common ancestors up to 500 million years ago. Whether growing by the side of a forest path or served on toast, the classic "mushroom" fruiting bodies are only the most visible signs of some of the large fungi, which may exist for all or most of the time as long, hidden filaments known as hyphae. Trees, some of the world's largest plants, depend on fungi for help in obtaining nutrition from the soil. Fungi are present in almost every habitat on earth, and single specimens can occupy several hectares of land. They occupy a key place at the base of the food chain and are of great economic and biological importance, but it is only recently that scientists have begun to realize the ecological significance of fungi. The chapter on conservation gives an idea of just how vital it is to study and protect the habitats in which they thrive.

作者介绍:

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