

Kingdom Encyclopedia Article

Kingdom

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Kingdom

The classification or taxonomy hierarchy can be credited to Carolus Linnaeus, a Swedish botanist who lived during the eighteenth century. This classification hierarchy starts at its broadest level with kingdom, which are made up of phyla, which in turn are made up of classes, which are equally made up of orders, and so on down to species. At the time of Aristotle in the fourth century B.C., two kingdoms of living forms were recognized-the Plantae and Animalia. Today, with more sophisticated techniques, most scientists recognize the five kingdom approach first proposed by R. H. Whittaker in 1969. The Kingdom Monera includes the prokaryotic ("before seed or kernels," meaning before the nucleus) bacteria and blue-green bacteria (formerly known as blue-green algae). This group is differentiated by the lack of membrane-bound nuclei. Prokaryotes also lack other cell organelles such as mitochondria, chloroplasts, and other specialized structures. Bacteria function primarily as decomposers, and some groups are able to chemosynthesize. Blue-green bacteria are common photosynthetic organisms in aquatic ecosystems, and can form dense mats on lakes during the summer. All other organisms are quite different from prokaryotes because they have the structures mentioned above, and are thus called eukaryotic ("true kernels", or true nucleus). The Kingdom Fungi consists of molds, yeasts, and mushrooms. These organisms function primarily as decomposers and obtain their food by secreting enzymes that break down organic matter in the tissues of living or dead organisms and absorbing the released nutrients. Organisms in the Kingdom Protista include unicellular protozoans and unicellular algae. This kingdom is alternately known as the Protoctista Kingdom. Members of the Kingdom Plantae include mosses, liverworts, ferns, macro-algae (green, brown, and red algae), and seed-bearing plants (conifers and flowering plants). Lastly, members of the Kingdom Animalia include the invertebrates (e.g., sponges, flatworms, nematodes, arthropods, etc.) and the vertebrates, which are included in the Phylum Chordata.