



Cristina Chiappini, Francesca Matteucci

A Natural History of the Milky Way

Series: Popular Astronomy

- The first popular science book devoted to explaining the formation and evolution of our Galaxy with an emphasis on its chemistry
- Explains the origin of the chemical elements with a special focus on the biogenic elements
- Enables the reader to place the interesting results of recent space missions, such as WMAP and FUSE in context
- Focuses on a range of hot topics, including the search for earth-like planets and the hunt for the very first stars

One of the most stunning features of the night sky, and Earth's home, the Milky Way is fertile ground for exploring the mysteries of the universe. This book will provide an overview of how astronomers have attempted to uncover our Galaxy's past, and how current models of its structure may account for some of the most recent observations. Indeed, the distribution of chemical elements in our Galaxy serves as a 'fossil record' of its evolutionary history and is a powerful tool for studying the formation and evolution, not only of the Milky Way, but also of other galaxies. In their journey through the history of our Galaxy the authors answer many fascinating and intriguing questions, such as: what can the Milky Way tell us about the Big Bang? What were the very first stars like? Are we able to find any of these first stars, still shining today, but born at a time when no metals had been formed and the gas and the Galaxy consisted of only hydrogen and helium? How did the main biogenic elements form and how are they distributed throughout the Galaxy? Are there regions of our Galaxy where Earth-like planets such as ours might more easily form? The text is addressed to the curious or interested reader and is intended to unveil to a general popular science audience some of the topics about the structure and evolution of our Galaxy which are now the subject of hot debate amongst professional astronomers around the world.

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