
I have been waiting for this book. Firstly it is part of a consistently excellent range of books from the People and Plants programme and, secondly, the lead author Alan Hamilton is a widely admired leader in plant conservation. One immediately recognizes that this book, by Alan and his son Patrick, is based on knowledge gained from years of real experience and the deep understanding of a topic that cannot be caught from quick consultancies or 10-day field trips.

Like the rest of the People and Plants series this is not an academic tome, it is a practical manual using fascinating and diverse case studies to provide practical responses to plant conservation problems. The book, as befits the series, is about people and plants: it is about the conservation of plant resources in the human modified landscapes that dominate most of the world. The book’s title clearly places the work in the context of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation. The principles of the Ecosystem Approach as adopted by the Convention specifically promote local management of natural resources, emphasize ecosystem services and honour local knowledge, innovations and practices. Accordingly the Hamiltons’ place plant conservation in the context of the village and the everyday need to supply building materials, fodder and medicines. This book is not about conservation biology as practiced in the university laboratory, botanic garden or the glamorous ungulate packed national park.

The case studies are drawn from around the world. While there are some familiar stories, such as the issue of wood carving on the Kenyan coast, this book is rich in fascinating case studies including Ethiopian sacred forests, the Indian medicinal plant trade, and the fodder systems of Pakistan. The introductory chapters provide a basic scientific context for plant conservation. It should be noted that this book gives relatively little attention to the recovery of threatened species and the science of species conservation or habitat restoration but instead focuses on the practical management of plant resources that are utilized to sustain livelihoods and health. Later chapters include reviews of the nature of knowledge and learning, traditional land management, and tenure systems, the meaning and symbolism of plants, in situ management and community conservation processes. The international legal tools are usefully reviewed, most notably the Convention on Biological Diversity and CITES, with regard to their impact on local communities and plant trade.

The Hamiltons are to be congratulated. The book is well written and the text reflects Alan’s lively conversational style and his ability to tell a good story. This book is practical, with techniques for information gathering clearly outlined, relevant to much of the world, timely and fascinating. As with others in this series the book deserves to be translated and handed to every rural development officer, forester and conservationist as a reference and inspiration.

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To describe this book as ambitious is an understatement. It attempts to synthesize biodiversity information about the whole of South-east Asia, a very diverse region. Biologically, South-east Asia encompasses several biogeographic provinces; politically, the countries comprising South-east Asia range from those that border on anarchy to those that are under dictatorships. By daring to bring this book together for such a biologically, politically, culturally and economically diverse region, the authors should be commended. In the light of rapid economic development in South-east Asia, biodiversity loss is one of the most pressing issues for the region and this volume is a timely addition to the growing literature on the subject.

The amount of literature regarding biodiversity in South-east Asia is enormous. A quick search of the internet using Google Scholar for each of the 10 South-east Asian countries, using name of country + biodiversity,
yields pages and pages of both published and grey literature. The literature reviewed in the book does not, however, do justice to the amount of literature available for the region.

To illustrate, an assessment of the publications about South-east Asia biodiversity based on the Biological Abstract database for the period 1983–2003 (Fig. 1.11) gives the impression that peer reviewed articles were used as the book’s basis. A cursory review of the book’s references, however, shows that reports from newspapers were cited and grey literature from multilateral institutions was also used. Some important works, such as Brandon Jones et al. (2004, Asian primate classification, International Journal of Primatology, 25, 97–164), Mittermeier et al. (2005, Primates in Peril, Conservation International and the Primate Specialist Group, IUCN), and Wood et al. (2000, The Root Causes of Biodiversity Loss, Earthscan, London) with examples from the region, were overlooked.

Another glaring oversight is in Chapter 2, Biodiversity in a Hotspot, wherein the Philippines (p. 40–41) merits only nine lines, and with only one reference cited, whereas the discussion of Mentawi Island (p. 38) and Singapore (p. 153, 155, to cite a few instances), areas several times smaller and less diverse than the Philippines, receive more attention.

The conservation movement in South-east Asia is about 40 years old, yet biodiversity in the region continues to be lost. Since 1992, when the Convention on Biological Diversity was signed, billions of dollars have poured into the region to address biodiversity conservation issues but there is very little to show for it (see the IUCN Red List for the number of threatened species in South-east Asia). For a book about biodiversity and South-east Asia, there are curiously no references to regional initiatives such as the ASEAN Regional Center for Biodiversity Conservation and its successor institution, the ASEAN Center for Biodiversity.

The book should be viewed as the beginning of scholarly efforts to place the issue of biodiversity loss in South-east Asia on the mainstream agenda. The authors recommend in the last section Let the Biology Bloom that knowledge generation is needed. There is no doubt that knowledge generation can contribute to solve the biodiversity crisis in South-east Asia. However, this recommendation to undertake more biodiversity research does not seem to be commensurate with the scale of the problem. If the biodiversity crisis is likened to a house on fire, the 25 global biodiversity hotspots of Myers et al. (2000, Biodiversity hotspots for conservation priorities, Nature, 403, 853–858) represent 25 houses with raging fires going on simultaneously at a global scale. Instead of putting the fire out immediately, the book recommends that we take further action to understand what is being lost in those fires. There is danger that by the time we understand what is being lost, there is nothing more to save. At this stage, enough information is already available to fight the fire, i.e. to undertake tougher conservation actions to overcome the biodiversity crisis in South-east Asia. Business as usual practices will not suffice. This is a message that the book should have emphasized and given more attention to.

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Firouz’s English edition of The Complete Fauna of Iran covers all terrestrial vertebrates, offshore cetaceans and freshwater fishes. The first 40 pages include clear maps of Iran’s drainage basins, topography and an illustrated summary of early wildlife studies and management practices, including establishment of reserves, zoogeography, climate and vegetation zones. The text is conventionally divided: mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians and freshwater fish. Both accidentally and purposefully introduced exotics are included. Special consideration is given to large mammals, with illustrations and descriptions of endemic lions and tigers, both extirpated by the 1950s. The parlous condition of the last Asiatic cheetah population is highlighted. Listed or described are 168 mammal species, with colour drawings or photographs of representatives of all mammal families. The section on birds is the largest in that it covers 514 species, somewhat more than recent publications as a result of taxonomic revisions giving species status to former subspecies. For large genera, usually only one species is depicted. Iran is rich in reptiles and 199 are listed or described, including 115 lizards and 79 snakes. A short introduction summarizes research and collections of herptofauna since the late 19th century. All illustrations of reptiles are good colour photographs. The section on amphibians is short as there are only 20 species considered. The final section on fish covers 173 species including introduced exotics. The appendices list all reserves, national parks, nature monuments and protected areas. The bibliography is comprehensive, and both scientific and common names of the fauna are indexed.

The three sections of this multi-authored Handbook (Planning, Habitats, and Species) cover a broad range of subjects, including biodiversity evaluation methods, habitat survey and monitoring techniques, and survey and monitoring methods for groups of species from fungi to mammals. Although there is a UK focus to some parts of the Handbook, especially in some of the appendices, much of the methodology described is applicable worldwide.

Techniques for Wildlife Investigations and Management, 6th edition edited by Clait E. Braun (2005), xiv + 974 pp., Port City Press, Baltimore, Maryland, USA. ISBN 033564155 (hbk), USD 75.00 (outside USA USD 95.00).

Published on behalf of The Wildlife Society of the USA this major multi-authored compendium contains 34 chapters in five sections (Teaching and Communication Skills, Design and Analytical Techniques, Wildlife Investigational Techniques, Wildlife Management Techniques, and Wildlife Habitat Management). The focus of the book is largely North American, but most of the techniques described are applicable worldwide.


Published in association with the UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre, and with a foreword by Kofi Annan and an introduction by Richard Leakey, the 17 chapters of this multi-authored compendium provide a comprehensive overview of the state of knowledge of the six species of great apes: chimpanzee, bonobo, Sumatran orang-utan, Bornean orang-utan, eastern gorilla, and western gorilla. The chapters fall into four sections: evolution, dispersal and discovery of great apes, great ape biology, conserving great apes, and geographical distribution (by each of the 23 range countries). The Atlas is copiously illustrated with colour photographs and maps, and numerous boxes summarize key points.

The following publications have been received at the Editorial Office and may be of interest to readers:


References