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DESERTS: THE ENCROACHING WILDERNESS: A WORLD CONSERVATION ATLAS. Edited by Tony Allan and Andrew Warren. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993. 176 pp. US\$35.00 Hardback ISBN:0-19-520941-9.

What does the average person imagine when asked to describe a desert? Intensely hot, unbearably dry, windswept expanses of shifting sand? DESERTS: THE ENCROACHING WILDERNESS: A WORLD CONSERVATION ATLAS will expand that vision to include the variety of plants, animals, and peoples which are an integral part of this ecosystem. The book begins with a discussion of what deserts are and why they exist. Factors which continuously affect the arid landscape are water availability, sand and wind erosion, soil type, and flood patterns. The dynamics of each of these factors are discussed and illustrated. Plant, animal, and human life in the harsh desert environment face the challenges of temperature extremes, lack of water, and shortages of food. Adaptability is the key to survival.

Deserts cover approximately thirty percent of the land surfaces of the world and occupy significant portions of Africa, Australia, southwest and central Asia, western South America, and the southwestern United States. Fourteen major desert areas are described in detail with maps and text illustrating the extent of aridity, cities and settlements, transportation routes, international and disputed borders, and natural resources. Seasonal land features, such as rivers and lakes which appear only during the wet season, are shown in addition to permanent features.

Although deserts do not receive the amount of public interest that rainforests have, this book certainly captures the reader immediately. Every page has usually more than one color photograph, illustration or map depicting the landscape, flora, fauna, peoples and resources of the desert. A glossary is included to promote understanding of terminology and the book is well indexed.

DESERTS: THE ENCROACHING WILDERNESS: A WORLD CONSERVATION ATLAS is more than just a pretty picture book. It is a serious attempt to address issues related to the impact of human populations and the exploitation of resources in these regions. The harshness of the desert environment would seem to belie the fragility of this ecosystem. Yet experience has proven that deserts are extremely susceptible to the effects of mining, industry and development, overgrazing, and the demands of changes in water usage. DESERTS emphasizes that "what little life there is in deserts can all too easily be destroyed, and desert margins will become increasingly desertified as human activity ruins productive land" (p. 158). Strategies for conservation and sustainable development of the desert margins is essential if further degradation and desertification is to be minimized.

Highly recommended for public and academic libraries.