

Review: Terrestrial Ecoregions of the Indo-Pacific: A Conservation Assessment

By Eric Wikramanayake, et al.

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Eric Wikramanayake, Eric Dinerstein, Colby J. Loucks, David M. Olson, John Morrison, John Lamoreaux, et al. *Terrestrial Ecoregions of the Indo-Pacific: A Conservation Assessment*. Washington, DC: Island Press, 2000. 643 pp. ISBN 1-55963-923-7 (paper). US\$85.00

On any dimension, this is a big book-in vision, execution, quality and detail of content, message, potential value to readers, and even simply pages and sheer weight. Regrettably, the publishers have not treated it with the respect that it deserves. There are an excessive number of typographic errors, but even worse, many of the maps, which are absolutely central to the purposes of the book, are so reduced in size as to be almost useless! I have found it quite essential to photocopy most at double their printed size. Doubtless, the publishers were concerned to keep the price down-but full colour photocopying, particularly in many of the target countries, makes it even more expensive than if it had been properly presented in the first place.

But let us return to its many excellent qualities. It essentially distinguishes 129 ecoregions across the wider area, describes each, and then assesses their current state of environment. Given the remarkable complexity and diversity of flora and fauna across the region, and the extent to which many areas can only be considered seriously data deficient, this is an immense task. But the authors deserve the highest commendation for what they have achieved. As a reviewer, I had to resort to my oft-utilised evaluation strategy of reading in detail on those areas where I have a reasonable personal knowledge. I could not seriously fault their data; although it had to be tightly summarised, it is both right up-to-date with current knowledge and well balanced.

Their presentation must also be praised. Content lists and the index are excellent, and there are valuable glossaries of both terminology and acronyms. Their methodology and assumptions are assiduously explained throughout so that readers can make their own assessment of the validity and reliability of the various analyses and judgements that are presented. It is an invaluable reference and fills a very important role.

Like virtually all biodiversity writing, it tends to ignore the geological basis of

biodiversity and pays all too little attention to invertebrate, subterranean and/or aquatic biodiversity. But these are not totally overlooked. The book is supplemented by some 29 essays on specific topics and some of these emphasise the importance of these commonly overlooked themes-the problem of data deficiency looms very large indeed in trying to do anything more at this regional scale than these essays have done.

The authors have not backed away from the big questions. They use their assembled data to examine such questions as how we might set conservation priorities, the location of the most important centres of biodiversity, the distribution of the greatest threats, and assessment of options for future action.

So, it is an indispensable reference for those working in the region, it addresses and challenges the ways in which we use (or fail to use) data for conservation decision-making; and it constitutes a very loud call for action.

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