

Review: Deserts: The Living Drylands

By Sara Oldfield

Reviewed by [Alan L. Chan](#)

Chinese Lutheran Church, San Francisco, USA

.....
Sara Oldfield. *Deserts: The Living Drylands*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. 2004. 160pp. ISBN 0-262-15112-X. U.S. \$29.95 (hardcover).

Designed as a companion to her previous work, *Rainforest*, Sara Oldfield includes in her new book, *Deserts: The Living Drylands*, valuable information on a variety of deserts across our planet Earth.

Supplemented with 180 colorful pictures, this volume is composed of seven chapters. The first chapter is a general introduction to deserts around the world: their landscapes, ecology and adaptations, people, and resources. The following five chapters concentrate on the details of specific locations such as the deserts in Africa, the Middle East, Asia, Australia, and the Americas. Finally, the last chapter comprises an intense discussion and urgent plea for the future of the world's drylands.

Making an effort to define the term "desert," Oldfield argues that it often carries the connotations of dryness, remoteness and barrenness. Deserts are also believed to be some of the most uninhabitable places on earth. However, vivid images support the author's factual evidence that not only does a variety of vegetation thrive in these environments, but also reptiles, frogs, fish, birds, and mammals. Most importantly, it is known that people have dwelled in deserts at least as long as there have been written records. Therefore, a desert does not necessarily imply a dull and lifeless habitat. As the title suggests, the book attempts to inform the reader about not only the geology and ecology of deserts, but the many means of survival of desert creatures. *Deserts* provides a balanced presentation of both the vitality and vulnerability of the living things in the deserts.

Oldfield is the global programs director with the wildlife conservation charity organization, Fauna and Flora International. In a call for critical international cooperation, she expresses her hope for the future of deserts in the following way:

Achieving this objective [to combat desertification] will involve long term integrated strategies that focus simultaneously, in affected areas, on improved productivity of land, and the rehabilitation, conservation and sustainable management of land and water resources, leading to improved

living conditions, in particular at the community level. (p.138)

Without doubt, this volume is another of Oldfield's noble appeals for preservation of our ecosystems. *Deserts* will convince readers that the critical problem of desertification is a global issue and should be addressed through the committed cooperation of international communities, governmental bodies and NGOs. I salute her tireless effort to educate the public and rally support for conserving our ecosystems via both substantial and realistic means. In sum, she raises our awareness that deserts are not harsh, lifeless places but living treasures that should not be abandoned or abused, but conserved and protected.

.....

Alan L. Chan <alanchan1@ureach.com> Director of Mission, Chinese Lutheran Church, 2701 Balboa Street, San Francisco, CA, TEL: 415- 221-5330.