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BOOK REVIEWS

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Tourism, Recreation and Climate Change

EDITED BY C. MICHAEL HALL AND JAMES HIGHAM

xii + 309 pp., 23.5 × 15.5 × 1.5 cm, ISBN 1 84541 003 03 paperback, GB£ 26.95/US$ 49.95, Clevedon, UK: Channel View Publications, 2005

This edited volume contains 21 chapters, which together cover every aspect of the relationship between tourism and climate change, and the state of the art in this field.

The book starts ominously, with a chapter by the editors that is full of environmentalist alarmism and Crichtonesque disregard for fact and balance. Fortunately, De Freitas continues in a moderate scientific tone. He argues for bioclimatic indicators, a curious attempt to study tourist comfort (and presumably behaviour) without studying tourists. Alas, his chapter offers nothing new to the initiated, and nothing specific to the uninitiated.

The book really starts with the chapter by Scott and colleagues. Based on a comprehensive literature survey, they dispel the myth that climate and tourism were linked only recently; they argue convincingly against research that is either pure natural, or pure social science. Mather and colleagues discuss the potential effects of climate change on tourism, but only qualitatively. Perry repeats this, but with salient details and helpful references, focusing on the Mediterranean. Preston-Whyte and Watson discuss nature tourism and climate change in Southern Africa, but only in physical and ecological terms. Craig-Smith and Ruhanen offer similar material for Oceania. Scott and colleagues focus on North America, but restrict the treatment to climate as a resource for tourism and technical adaptation. Harrison and colleagues study snow in Scotland winter tourism resorts and mention that a survey of tourist operators has been conducted, but fail to report results. Bürki and colleagues,looking at ski tourism in the Swiss Alps, take a further step, studying the behaviour of tourist operators. Aall and Hoeyer look at adaptation in Norwegian skiing, mixing up weather and climate. Dewar reports weather effects on recreation in the USA. Trapasso studies perceptions of ozone depletion in Argentina. Richardson and Loomis present a contingent visitation analysis for Rocky Mountain National Park, this study stands out for its rigorous statistical analysis of tourist behaviour.

Dubois and Ceron show that tourism contributes substantially to greenhouse gas emissions in France. Hoeyer and Aall repeat this for Norway. Becken and Simmons do a similar thing for New Zealand, adding more details. Peeters takes a detailed look at fuel consumption of aircraft, including possible emission reduction. Goessling expands the discussion of the environmental impacts of tourism to include land and water use. Fraendberg pulls everything together, in her chapter on 'tourism as victim, problem or solution'. This is repeated in the final chapter by Higham and Hall.

Although not every author has offered the best work to this volume, overall, this book provides a good introduction to the current state of research on tourism and climate change. It highlights several shortcomings of most research in this area. First, there is a reluctance to study tourists and tourist operators. Most studies focus on physical aspects. Second, there is an emphasis on single locations, even though the tourist sector is highly competitive. The fate of a tourism resort is not determined in that resort, but rather how it fares relative to its competitors. Third, quantification is rare. Fortunately, the first attempts to overcome these shortcomings are now being published.

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The Fire Ant Wars: Nature, Science, and Public Policy in Twentieth-Century America

BY JOSHUA BLU BUHS

x + 216 pp., 15 × 23 × 1.5 cm, ISBN 0 226 07982 1 paperback, GB£16.00/US$22.50, Chicago, IL, USA: The University of Chicago Press, 2004

Joshua Buhs has written an engaging history of the life and times of the fire ant (*Solenopsis invicta*) in its invasion and conquest of the USA. In doing so, Buhs offers a variety of 'books' within this one work: it is a natural history of fire ants, a case study of USA environmental policy and politics, an environmental history of the American South (with both regional and transnational aspects), a glimpse into the history of USA entomology, and a blend of agricultural history and the history of science and technology, all based on impressive multi-archival research.

To accomplish such a task, Buhs divided the book into five chapters; subdividing them further would have been helpful as most chapters are long, some with over two hundred footnotes. The first chapter is cleverly entitled 'From South America to the American South, 1900–1950' and examines the fire ant's introduction to the USA, arriving at the port of Mobile, Alabama, on cargo boats with goods from Brazil. Here, Buhs spells out the transnational connections that occurred via the export/import industry, including the explosive irruption of the inadvertently transplanted insect. In Chapter Two ('Grins a prohibitive fracture, 1945–1957'), Buhs goes into how the fire ant was perceived as a menace to farmers and hunters, and discusses the early work of entomologists to control its spread, unsuccessful as it was.

In Chapter Three ('Fire ants, from savage to invincible, 1957–1972', hence its species name of *invicta*), we watch how the fire ant's image changes over time, from enemy to mild annoyance and even to ally for some, especially as the eradication efforts with toxic insecticides (such as DDT, chlordane and Mirex) were ineffective against the ants and results turned out to be worse than the ants themselves. A war not only raged within the general public about eradication versus control, but also within the field of entomology as myrmecologists struggled to clarify the ant's taxonomy. The debate surrounding these turns of events is detailed in Chapter Four, 'The fire ant wars, 1958–1983', warsthat pitted university and government entomologists against each other and against policy makers on the question of the ant's management. Buhs uses this chapter as

a foray into the history of the beginnings of the environmental movement in the USA, a useful chronological discussion that spins off of pesticide/pollution questions in the late 1950s and 1960s, with appropriate discussion of the role of such notables as E.O. Wilson and Rachel Carson. Some readers may be alarmed that Buhs questions Carson's critique of the chemical industry in the USA, claiming that there is no evidence that profit motive was involved in the industry's research about and promotion of chemical insecticides.

Finally, in Chapter Five ('The practice of nature, 1978–2000'), Buhs brings the topic to the present and offers his own conclusions on how the story fits into a more philosophical discussion of humanity's place in nature. Throughout the book he constantly wants to tell readers how the fire ant wars were indicative of the larger question of mankind as a part of, or apart from, nature. But his analyses on that matter do not always work and seem contrived or forced, which too often disrupts the narrative. He also attempts to link the wars against fire ants with America's larger Cold War struggle to contain communism at home and abroad, a theory that is not backed by sufficient analysis or evidence and that distracts from more important environmental and agricultural questions. Likewise, the book's format occasionally suffers from an overuse of first-person interruptions (for example 'I think,' 'I conclude,' 'In Chapter 2, I traced . . . ') that could have been excised without damaging the book's structure or style.

However, author and publisher should be applauded for including such a wealth of useful figures, photographs, and illustrations, and for placing footnotes at the bottom of pages; a dying function that most readers and students appreciate. Thus, the book (minor flaws notwithstanding) is a fine work of scholarship that I will enjoy using in classes on environmental and agricultural history. Others could find it useful for courses on environmental policy, history of science and entomology, and the book will assuredly be warmly received by audiences within the general public.

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Indigenous Knowledge and Ethics. A Darrell Posey Reader

EDITED BY KRISTINA PLENDERLEITH

xiv + 274 pp., 24 × 16 × 2 cm, ISBN 0 415 32363 0 hardback, GB£ 65.00, London, UK/New York, USA: Routledge, 2004

Darrell Posey was a hugely influential figure in the spheres of ethnobiology and traditional resource rights, and this posthumous reader aims to give an 'ideal introduction to his thought and work'. The book consists of 17 of his articles, presented in three sections: on ethnoentomology, wider applications of indigenous knowledge and intellectual property rights and ethical concerns.

The first section consists of a set of papers from the 1970s and 1980s on ethnoentomology (defined tentatively as 'the knowledge and use of insects in different human societies'), including papers based on Posey's own fieldwork in the southern USA and in Brazil. The second section demonstrates a broadening of Posey's writing from empirical research to policy implications for indigenous rights, conservation and development. It sets out many of the basic issues that are still core to the field of ethnobiology, including the distribution and consistency of indigenous knowledge within local communities; the dangers of romanticizing indigenous peoples as Rousseauian 'noble savages'; the roleof indigenous knowledge in the development of new forest products and the implications for forest conservation; anthropogenic landscapes, and the links between biological and cultural diversity. The final section shows a further progression in policy approaches, presenting a set of articles that move from an initial emphasis on the potential for indigenous peoples to gain income through the development of new forest products to a more complex and cautious approach that recognizes the dangers of commercialization, including its sociocultural and environmental impacts, the lack of safeguards against exploitation by dominant commercial partners, and the dangers of replacing traditional value systems with a commodity-based approach to natural resources.

Inevitably, given its emphasis on advocacy, much of the material in the book is now dated, although it is depressing to see that many of the calls for action made in the mid-1990s are the same as those being made today. There is also much repetition between chapters. However, the collection is a rich source of information on the development of thought and policy on indigenous intellectual property rights.

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In Search of the Rain Forest

EDITED BY CANDICE SLATER

x + 318 pp., 15.5 × 23 × 2 cm, ISBN 0 8223 3218 3 paperback, GB£ 17.95, Durham, USA: Duke University Press, 2003

Are rainforests really seas of lush greenery, full of chattering monkeys and brightly coloured parrots? Are they really untouched paradises reminiscent of the Garden of Eden? *In Search of the Rain Forest* invites us to reconsider these stereotyped visions of the rainforest that have been so prominent for so many years through a series of case studies examining social perceptions of rainforests.

At its heart, *In Search of the Rain Forest* makes a plea for the wider recognition of a social context to rainforests. In this vein, two themes can be identified, albeit with difficulty: the roles that people have played in physically shaping rainforest ecosystems, and how rainforests are perceived from afar. We are shown how the Mayan rainforests are more accurately described as managed gardens, and tiger conservation in India can be aided by the presence of traditional human settlements within reserves. We are also taken on journeys exploring Western perceptions of rainforest culture: is well-marketed Mayan ecotourism authentic or does it merely cater to the pre-conceptions of foreign tourists? Are the rainforests of Ecuador as devoid of human life as they are portrayed? Taken individually, the case studies that comprise the separate chapters are interesting

enough, but together they present a rather eclectic collection of essays that do not link or flow well. Furthermore, it is difficult to understand the point of some chapters and how they relate to the book's stated goal. The chapters are not always easy to read, in some cases overlap each other in content, and suffer from copious amounts of footnotes that contain information that is often crucial to the text. This is exemplified by Chapter Six on 'bio-ironies.'To learn what a 'bio-irony' is, I had to read the footnotes. In several chapters, explicit attempts are made to link the case studies with the book's overall thesis, but these often appear to be tacked on as afterthoughts, rather than forming integral parts of the essays. The one shining exception to this criticism is Suzana Sawyer's essay showing how the ARCO company has cleverly depicted Ecuadorian rainforests as uninhabited. With a clarity of argument that is lacking in the rest of the book, Sawyer shows that by de-humanizing perceptions of the rainforest, ARCO has been able to downplay the rights of, and cause social divisions among, the local indigenous peoples, and that this has directly benefited the company. In this sole chapter, it is apparent that social perceptions of rainforest matter and influence 'the policies of corporations, environmental groups and governments,' as claimed on the book's back cover.

There are some interesting contrasts hidden within the pages of *In Search of the Rain Forest* that would make good intellectual fodder. For instance, why is the Amazon rainforest so often portrayed as a welcoming paradise, African rainforest as dark and forbidding, and the rainforest of Borneo as wild and savage? But these contrasts are never openly discussed and the questions are left unanswered, leaving the reader at the end searching for a way to synthesize the book's message. The afterword was clearly designed to do just this, but falls short. Instead of the authors revisiting the book's central question and drawing the chapters together, they inevitably revisit and reinterpret their own chapters in isolation. This is not to say the book does not have an admirable purpose, it clearly does. Unfortunately, the body of the book largely fails to do it justice.

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The New Consumers: the Influence of Affluence on the Environment

BY NORMAN MYERS AND JENNIFER KENT

xv + 199 pp., 11 tables, 1 fig., ISBN 1 55963 997 0 hardback, US$ 24.00, Washington DC, USA: Island Press, 2004

Pursuing a line of argument advanced in numerous earlier writings, Norman Myers and Jennifer Kent urge a brake on the explosive growth of consumerism threatening the world with irreversible degradation of the environment and unsustainable exploitation of natural resources. That dual menace, already alarming, will be severely exacerbated as more developing countries enter middle-income ranks, eager to emulate the lifestyle and affluence of those further up the economic ladder.

What to do? Both behavioural changes and a more enlightened approach to resource-intensive activities, it is argued, can promote a more benign outcome. For example, less meat consumption by today's affluent ensures better health and less pressure on agricultural land. And greatly improved energy efficiency in transportation promises benefits to developing and developed countries alike.

Following an opening chapter introducing the topic, eight others elaborate on it. Three of them (automotive transport, meat consumption and electric power usage) address major sources of rising consumption with significant environmental and resource-depleting consequences. Another two chapters accord detailed attention to China and India, followed by one that treats the 20 'new consumer' countries across the board. The final two chapters wrestle with the concept of 'sustainable consumption.' Tabular material, often germane and instructive, and sometimes a bit murky, runs through the book. So do anecdotal asides, similarly illuminating, though tinged by an occasional air of smugness, such as reminders of America's dietary excess with its baleful influence worldwide. Bibliographical citations are extensive, though decisively tilted to those with a 'limits-to-growth' orientation.

The overarching theme of overconsumption raises serious and profound ethical dilemmas. At the same time, it is an idea demanding disciplined thinking about the path to a less stressful future. Here, the book suffers somewhat from the authors' tendency to inject a veritable minefield of descriptors, such as waste, inefficiency, sustainability, overconsumption, misconsumption and other value-laden constructs, rich in rhetoric but sparse in operational precision. It would help if such indicators were made more meaningful, given the political and economic discourse around which effective choices about the future have tobe articulated.

Of course, some things are unambiguous, as the authors usefully point out. It is vital to press for the elimination of water and fuel subsidies; to highlight the 'free rider' avoidance of pollution costs; and to underscore the multiple ills associated with automotive congestion. All such distortions stimulate excess demand for energy and other resources. It is also useful to be reminded of conservation opportunities that more widespread awareness would facilitate. These are areas conspicuously rife with economic and social waste, frequently bordering on the perverse. But we should not let our ideals cloud the facts of life. The authors should have been more careful (for example when claiming that solar photoelectric cells are *even now* able to provide competitive electricity) in recognizing the technological or cost constraints that inhibit what might eventually be achievable. In the critical area of greenhouse warming, to suggest that slowing climate change would be costless ignores the drastic and far-from-costless reduction in greenhouse gas emissions that some experts regard as warranted on benefit-cost grounds.

But a benefit-cost mindset does not often enter into the exposition. Nor is there sufficient appreciation of the fact that successfully managing one discrete set of problems may aggravate others of major concern in their own right. If the health and environmental threat posed by grain-based meat consumption induces a shift to seafood, we had better consider how this might intensify the already severe problem of maintaining the world's fish stocks in a sustainable-yield manner.

Having laid out a 'business-as-usual' picture of consumption trends over the years ahead, the authors discuss, mostly qualitatively, how a much more benign future might be achieved, noting that '[t]he global community needs to cut its use of natural resources by 50% by the year 2050 . . . [and] developed countries that use the

bulk of resources should aim for a 90% cutback.' Since conventional material wants would need to be substantially curtailed to reach that goal, the authors propose a range of desirable lifestyle changes: less intensive car use, more volunteerism, insistence on recycling and access to products with zero emissions, and many other adaptations which, in the authors' words, mean 'leaving the rat race to those sleek overcompetitive rats.'

Will the inertia of human nature prove too unyielding in pursuit of this vision? For their part, the authors perceive a 'growing convergence between the idealist and the realist.' I believe the jury, perhaps lamentably, remains out on that fundamental question.

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Conservation

BY CLIVE HAMBLER

vii + 368 pp., figs. & tables, 23 × 15 × 1.5 cm, ISBN 0 521 00038 6 paperback, GB£ 18.99, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004

Clive Hambler's *Conservation* introduces the concepts and definitions of modern conservation science, discusses the history of threats to biodiversity, describes methods for prioritizing, monitoring and managing biodiversity, then focuses on habitat restoration, environmental economics, education and policy. It is intended to help train conservationists. It joins the 'Studies in Biology' series as an aid to learning and fieldwork for undergraduate students.

Conservation biology suffers a rather split personality: it joins ecological disciplines like entomology and limnology as both an applied and a fundamental science. But its very name implies what remains a subjective priority: that biodiversity must be conserved. Any textbook on conservation biology must therefore have at least three lines of argument. First, that biodiversity is at risk. Second, that biodiversity is important. Third, that ecologists have the theoretical and practical tools to help conserve biodiversity. Conservation scientists work to develop, and are frequently forced to defend, each of these arguments. Students of conservation must therefore be well-trained in biogeography, history, sociology, ethics, economics, law and ecology. However, students must also be trained in scientific critique and the synthesis of evidence-based arguments. Conservation is a popular choice of module or course at university, perhaps because it involves fantastic species and communities in beautiful places, but the 'drier' aspects of the science, including the modern emphasis on biodiversity and the need for quantitative and mathematical approaches, must be made exciting.

Hambler's text succeeds in its admirable coverage of international conservation issues but, in my opinion, is weak in its scientific critique and readability. It follows a now-standard framework for conservation texts. It first defines conservation and biodiversity. I was initially frustrated to find yet another definition of 'conservation', a word already burdened by multiple meanings, but Hambler's 'protection of wildlife from irreversible harm'adds a much-needed target for conservation science: to 'irreversible' he gives a timescale of one human generation. Hambler promotes the direct and indirect, economic, ecological and cultural values of biodiversity, but then spends nearly 60 pages listing examples of and reasons for declining biodiversity. This makes for depressing reading and lends an apocalyptic tone to the rest of the book, if read from cover to cover. The current 'state' of biodiversity deserves a more upbeat and objective treatment in conservation textbooks. This depressed reader then better enjoyed four chapters full of examples of conservation methods for species and habitats. The real strength of the book, however, lies in its coverage of habitat restoration and, finally, the sociological and political aspects of conservation.

Hambler's text is full of lists. This will obviously be useful for students, especially as these lists are in table form. However, lists are poor substitutes for colour, figures, photos and explanatory boxes. These constitute the modern format for science textbooks and, I believe, students (and lecturers) will choose alternative texts with more attractive layouts than Hambler's book, which lacks visual impact. A further weakness is that lists of statements are not accompanied by references to the primary literature: students cannot access the source of the 'facts' presented. Extra reading is offered at the end of the book, but much of this refers to other books, requiring good library resources and not making enough reference to the powerful and popular online journal resources available to modern students.

To summarize, Hambler's text synthesizes an advanced, global knowledge of conservation issues and problems, with particular strengths in habitat restoration and conservation politics. The ecological and quantitative aspects of conservation science are less strong, and the lack of visual impact, scientific critique and reference to primary literature is a shame. In a competitive market for conservation texts, future editions of this book deserve a place but must be better sold to undergraduates to earn that place.

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Conserving Biodiversity in Agricultural Landscapes: Model-Based Planning Tools

EDITED BY ROBERT K. SWIHART AND JEFFREY E. MOORE

xv + 336 pp., 45 figs., 25.5 × 18 × 2 cm, ISBN 1 55753 333 4 paperback, US$ 24.95, West Lafayette, USA: Purdue University Press, 2004

Conserving Biodiversity in Agricultural Landscapes (*Conserving Biodiversity*) is organized into three sections based on content and coverage including the framework of models, model infrastructure, and practical considerations and applications. The authors state that the book is intended for upper-level undergraduate students, graduate students, and natural resource and land-use planning professionals. The book could be used as a supplemental text or source of discussion in graduate seminar courses.

In the preface, the authors state that *Conserving Biodiversity* provides a road map for furthering our understanding of conservation in agricultural landscapes. They rely heavily and proffer spatially-structured models as a means to advance this conceptual understanding. The authors' aim is to highlight and encourage conservation-based landscape planning that is interdisciplinary in nature. The book succeeds in this sense in that the chapters are intertwined and revolve around this common theme while incorporating multiple disciplines and dimensions (such as socioeconomic and natural resource disciplines). This is a major strength of *Conserving Biodiversity*.

Conserving Biodiversity provides excellent coverage of both more qualitative (i.e. conceptual) and quantitative models for landscape planning. Section II is primarily quantitative and may not be suited for undergraduate students. The writing style is clear and concise; however, several conceptually-based chapters are devoid of, or only include one figure. Throughout, figures are varied in style and formatting. In particular: some figures include text that is illegible; map figures often do not include a north arrow or map scale; and numerous figures do not include citations as to their origin. This last point is annoying, as the reader has no idea of the origin of the figure (for example geographical information system databases) or the authors involved. A summation of all references is included at the end of the book, however readers might have found it more useful to have chapter-specific references.

Overall, *Conserving Biodiversity* is a timely book that offers a stimulating discussion of the mechanics and tools that might be needed to prioritize conservation and natural resources in land-use planning projects. I found the book a useful, reasonably priced and informative source, and one from which I could easily apply segments into graduate courses such as landscape ecology and wildlife biology and management.

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Isle of Fire. The Political Ecology of Landscape Burning in Madagascar

BY CHRISTIAN A. KULL

xiv + 322 pp., 22.5 × 15 × 2 cm, ISBN 0 226 461141 6 paperback, US$ 25.00, Chicago, USA/London, UK: The University of Chicago Press, 2004

A debate rages in the environmental literature over the proper role of fire in the landscape, as conservationists, ecologists, politicians and land managers alike seek to determine how much and what kind of fire is good for particular environments. For many, the problem lies in determining the precise formula of proscriptive and/or natural burning necessary to maintain a healthy environment or to restore a degraded one. But according to Christian Kull, the real 'fire problem' is political rather than ecological. In a carefully crafted and richly detailed book that weaves together political analysis and ecology, Kull argues that the real fire problem encompasses a century-long political struggle between two groups, foresters and government officials on one hand and local farmers and herders on the other, over natural resource use and protections. Kull is writing about fire on the island of Madagascar, but his argument holds true for at least a dozen other countries in Africa and elsewhere.

Kull explores the fire problem through the lens of political ecology. Political ecology is an approach to environment-society research that focuses on the political, economic and cultural forces that shape the physical environment and social relations between and within social groups. This approach should be familiar to environmental geographers, ecological anthropologists and other social scientists studying environmental issues, especially those that involve environmental conflicts, but may be new to some readers of *Environmental Conservation*. Kull uses political ecology to examine how people negotiate, cooperate, and/or fight over the access, control, use and character of environmental resources in Madagascar. The book's central argument is that contrary to the predominant anti-fire wisdom, fire is an integral part of many rural Malagasy production systems. Kull makes three assertions about fire in Madagascar: first, the colonial and postcolonial governments criminalized burning for economic and ideological reasons; second, many farmers and herders resisted the criminalization because fire was critical to their livelihoods; and third, the resistance succeeded due largely to the internal inconsistencies within the state and the biophysical properties of fire.

Isle of Fire is divided into three sections. Part one lays out the central issues, the fire conflict, the setting and Kull's theoretical approach. Part two details the indigenous uses of fire while carefully explaining the three major livelihood systems in Madagascar and describing how fire use differs for each case. Part three begins with a chronology of the history of the fire conflict, including the major policies and their impacts, and ends with a discussion of the most recent alternative strategy for fire management. Kull concludes that the solution to the fire problem is the decentralization of fire management to the local level.

The most novel section of the book is chapter two appropriately titled 'The nature of fire: good fire, bad fire, complex fire'. Here, rather than take a definitive position on the role of fire in the environment, Kull carefully describes how fire is simultaneously good and bad depending on your perspective. This tact allows Kull to demonstrate the rationality behind the anti-fire wisdom of the forest service as well as the pro-fire view held by the indigenous populations and local land managers. Such a perspective is crucial to understanding why the state has long criminalized fire and why rural land users have persistently resisted such controls. Kull concludes the chapter by highlighting an often-neglected issue in the fire literature; the ambiguity of the agency and purpose of the humans that use fire. Kull reminds us that people never have complete control over fire, that there are multiple and overlapping reasons for burning, and that the effects of fire do not necessarily correspond with the goals of ignition. In an era of global change research where scientists who study fire in the tropics increasingly look to remotely-sensed imagery to find generalizable patterns to explain fire use, Kull reminds us how complicated the situation can be on the ground.

The strength of Kull's work is his ability to synthesize a diverse body of literature and data encompassing fire ecology, human ecology (indigenous knowledge) and social theory. The main weaknesses are on the ecological side. Kull's study of the different fire regimes and

their impacts across Madagascar is neither systematic nor thorough. He employs a smattering of methods to micro-case studies at a variety of sites with different fire ecologies and land uses, but none of the case studies is completed rigorously and many of the environmental data sources are weak. As a result, some readers might not be convinced by the ecological evidence presented. It should be noted, however, that in Madagascar, as in many impoverished nations, good environmental data are difficult to come by and Kull is forthcoming with disclaimers about the quality of the data he cites. In the end, the strength of Kull's political analysis more than makes up for any weaknesses on the ecological side. The book makes a powerful case that if Madagascar's unique biodiversity is going to be protected, we must begin with an understanding of the conflict over fire.

Isle of Fire is superbly written. Kull's style is fluid and his use of jargon is kept to a minimum. Some of this material will be familiar ground for those who have read the works of Stephen Pyne, but whereas Pyne gives us a grand and global narrative on fire, Kull gives us the specifics. In the tradition of the best political ecology, Kull's is an eclectic work that combines detailed description of indigenous land-use practices with careful social theoretical analysis that draws upon a broad mix of theory. I recommend it to scholars and practitioners interested in understanding the causes of persistent environmental conflicts, be they related to fire or not.

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