

## Book Reviews

**Global Biodiversity Strategy: Guidelines for Action to Save, Study, and Use Earth's Biotic Wealth Sustainably and Equitably** edited by the World Resources Institute (WRI), the World Conservation Union (IUCN), and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP). New York: World Resources Institute, 1992. Pp.vi + 244; index. £13.95 (paperback). ISBN 0 915825 74 0

**Global Warming and Biological Diversity** edited by Robert L. Peters and Thomas E. Lovejoy. New Haven, CT & London: Yale University Press, 1992. Pp.xxi + 386; index. £26 (hardback). ISBN 0 300 05056 9

The first of these books views biodiversity from an international agency perspective and attempts to combine contributions from over 800 individuals (one tenth of the book is used to list them). The first two chapters show a utilitarian anthropocentric view of the value of biodiversity and give six human causes of species loss. These chapters describe the problem in terms of poor human management (p.5) and suggests that the solution is improved stewardship (pp.17, 24). This position is set within the need for 'sustainable development'. Perhaps owing to the multiple contributions, the argument is often repetitive and contradicts itself or is poorly explained – for example, the trend in human population is unsustainable but new patterns of development are possible which will accommodate this growth (p.15); ownership by the many (public goods) leads to exploitation, therefore individuals must have a private property right, but ownership by the few (especially urban men) leads to exploitation. A failure of the book at this point is to recognise how a purely utilitarian position allows humanity to reduce the planet to an industrial farm where species only exist if humans desire, tolerate or are unable to destroy them.

The actual strategy for conservation of biodiversity consists of a list of 85 actions spread over the remaining seven chapters. These are couched in the language of development with the appropriate nods and winks towards women's rights, recycling and especially the third world (which comes in for much paternalistic advice). Actions, rather than a strategy, are suggested and a dozen things that 'should' be done are given. As a result the book is reminiscent of a planetary green consumer guide with 101 ways to save the environment. As with such books there is no 'strategy', but a more general motivation and the freedom to pick and chose appropriate, morally satisfying actions (although five actions are given priority here). Overall the book has some interesting examples, it might be useful for teaching, and it does show the current state of international agency understanding.

A more satisfying read and far more informative is the second book. The result of a conference held in 1988 and organised by WWF (US), biodiversity is seen as a problem of trying to maintain stability (in terms of diversity) in a system that has been knocked out of equilibrium (by global warming). The natural science contributors are almost exclusively based in the US, but the papers have been chosen to show impacts in a variety of ecosystems and are accessible to the non-scientist.

A problem confronting such a book is how to examine changes for which

current knowledge is inadequate – that is, regional data from Global Circulation Models (GCMs) is absent. The approach here is to use the predictions of a GCM developed by the National Center for Atmospheric Research to inform the contributors as to likely scenarios. In addition, some historical evidence of adaptation is used. On the basis of these data general estimates of physical changes are interpreted into likely ecosystem impacts. Adaptation itself will be limited by a faster rate of change, current isolationist land policies and preservation of minimum possible populations. I would recommend this book to those concerned with the title subjects, but also to those interested in land use and conservation.

A point of departure from the first book is the emphasis on the dynamic nature of the ecosystem changes which the planet is going to endure. Thus, basing development on the current philosophy of anthropocentric utilitarianism is flawed due to the complexity of the system, our ignorance and the inability of that methodology to express values commonly held to exist. I agree with Peters (p.26) that serious philosophical questions need to be discussed as the environmental changes we human animals have initiated force us to make choices between, for example, preserving seeds and animals in data banks or changing our fundamental view of the planet as biotic wealth to be 'developed'. How can humanity judge what biodiversity should be in a dynamic system? While some of the contributors to the second book also opt for stewardship (p.37) the need for a more fundamental change in how we view the world can also be found (p. 13). However, the second book does not attempt to offer a strategy for the management of biodiversity, but rather concentrates upon the physical biodiversity impacts of global warming, in the same way that previous global warming research has concentrated on sea level rise and agricultural damage.

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