

Book Reviews

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USING STABLE ISOTOPES IN ECOLOGY

Fry, Brian. 2006. **Stable isotope ecology**. Springer, New York. xii + 308 p. + CD-ROM. \$69.95, ISBN: 978-0387-30513-4 (acid-free paper).

Key words: fractionation; mixing; open and closed systems.

Highlighting the complexity and creativity in solving environmental problems through isotope ecology in his book, *Stable isotope ecology*, seminal isotope researcher, Brian Fry, offers the novice and expert his view of isotope circulation in the biosphere. The purpose of the book and accompanying CD is to equip researchers with the essential tools of isotope research (e.g., proper notation and measurements, and the use of tracers), while offering more complex examples and explanations of the fundamental principles governing isotope circulation (i.e., fractionation and mixing). Reading the book in tandem with applying Fry's simple yet effective modeling approach found on the CD, readers will be rewarded with a broad appreciation for the role of isotopes in ecology and feel confident in embarking on their own isotope research experience.

Agreeing with Fry, I believe information presented in the book, coupled with a review of contemporary research articles and the piloting of students' own isotope projects, creates the basis for a graduate or post-graduate course in stable isotope ecology. From the student's perspective, the book: (1) covers the application and utility of isotopes in multiple ecosystems (i.e., estuaries, ocean, marshes, and pastures), organisms (i.e., bacteria, fish, birds, plants, and mammals), and foodwebs; (2) clearly and methodically describes isotope calculations; and (3) presents an opportunity to model the movement of isotopes in the biosphere. For students, the biggest challenge is often their unfamiliarity with the "how-to's" of modeling; however, Fry provides models in the book that offer a mathematical framework to test students' isotope knowledge and can be used as a starting point to familiarize students while they begin isotope work. The strength of these models is exemplified in the "I Chi" modeling associated with Chapter 4 as the flow of isotopes is tracked in realistic examples (e.g., oxygen flow through algae in sea water and nitrogen flow through cows grazing in a pasture). As a graduate student attempting to decipher my own ^{15}N and ^{13}C data, I found this book to be very helpful with constructing my own circulation model and dealing with the problems associated with isotope fractionation.

Fry's book is best utilized by the novice graduate student, but may also aid instructors seeking to create their own isotope ecology courses. As an instructional tool, teachers would benefit from using many of the figures to explain isotope ecology. Fry's use of simplified and well-articulated examples offers access to otherwise complicated processes such as fractionation and mixing. Also, the suggested readings compiled by Fry for each section within a chapter are valuable resources for teachers and students.

Detailed coverage regarding the circulation of isotopes or the processes of fractionation and mixing occurring in the biosphere is provided by Fry. At first glance, these concepts seem easy enough to understand but they are, in reality, quite complicated. Fry does an excellent job introducing and explaining these two concepts, but the reader may become

bogged down with how this information is presented and organized in the book. Fractionation and mixing are covered in their own separate, long chapters that could have been subdivided. For example, the fractionation chapter could have been separated by "closed versus open systems."

Throughout the book, the author continually instructs the reader on the correct application of isotopes in ecology. I believe the most useful method of emphasizing the importance of this information was its presentation in boxes or explicit sections set apart from or outside the general text, which clearly delineated procedures or problems associated with isotope ecology. These concepts include: "how to get started," "ten practical suggestions for using isotopes to study food webs," "ten fractionation facts," and "conducting fractionation experiments." These suggestions are very helpful to students by clearly summarizing important facts associated with each topic.

The author's format for describing the correct methods in isotope ecology sometimes loses the reader's attention. Fry's overemphasis of the pitfalls or exemptions associated with equations or concepts is sometimes described in a lengthy discussion of a specific principle, which detours the reader from the overarching theme or concept.

Although the author writes in a conversational style, which may be an effective learning tool, his colloquialism detracts from the flow of the book. Colorful characters as "Mr. Polychaete" or "Fractionation Frank" and personal quips seemed to be too abstract and too frequently cited in the book. I believe all of these anecdotes may be more appropriate for high school students or undergraduates. While some of the cartoon illustrations demonstrated a purpose, they were distracting. The frequent use of "δ" cartoons was particularly bothersome as it did not seem integral to the book's objective.

Throughout the book, Fry encourages novices to enter the realm of isotope ecology; however, in my opinion he fails to help direct novices once they have entered. Fry's understanding of the world of stable isotope ecology is impressive and extensive, but after a 76 page chapter on fractionation only six pages are devoted to a chapter discussing the future of the field. Perhaps a specific chapter devoted to outlining avenues for future research, identifying gaps in our understanding of circulation in the biosphere, or forecasting new trends in isotope ecological research would have helped guide the novice in their future isotope pursuits.

Overall, Fry does an excellent job of conveying to the reader the proper use of isotopes as they circulate within the biosphere, as well as introducing the exciting world of isotope ecology. He includes both classic and contemporary examples of isotope ecology while reviewing the basic and innovative approaches to studying stable isotope ecology.

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PATTERNS IN PROCESS: INTERSECTION OF LANDSCAPE AND ECOSYSTEM ECOLOGY

Lovett, Gary M., Clive G. Jones, Monica G. Turner, and Kathleen C. Weathers, editors. 2005. **Ecosystem function in heterogeneous landscapes**. Springer, New York. xxiv + 489 p. \$139.00 (cloth), ISBN: 978-0387-24089-3 (acid-free paper); \$59.95 (paper), ISBN: 978-0387-24090-9 (acid-free paper).

Key words: connectivity; multiscale; networks; resource management; spatial variability.

Ecosystem ecology has advanced our understanding of the mechanisms and temporal dynamics underlying many processes, but it requires interaction with landscape ecology to sort out the complexity of spatial heterogeneity in ecosystem function. This interface of landscape and ecosystem ecology is new ground, and the challenge is pressing as ecologists endeavor to address regional and global issues of ecological sustainability. How do we conceptualize ecosystem function in heterogeneous, dynamic systems, collect empirical data to understand the interplay of structure and process, and gain predictive power for scientific, management and policy needs? *Ecosystem function in heterogeneous landscapes* undertakes these issues with the core, difficult question: how and when does heterogeneity, in all its forms, matter to whole system functioning?

This edited book has its origin in the Tenth Cary Conference held at the Institute of Ecosystem Studies (IES) in Millbrook, New York in 2003. These conferences explore fundamental and “cutting edge” questions in ecology and related fields. Under the leadership of Lovett, Jones, Turner, and Weathers, the tenth conference tackled the challenges to our understanding of how spatial heterogeneity influences functioning of individual ecosystems and the larger landscape. As the editors write, the existence of spatial heterogeneity is not a startling revelation to ecologists. Most ecosystem ecologists have actively dealt with heterogeneity in their experiments and data analysis. It has been both a tool to contrast ecological phenomena and a hindrance to “clean” observations. The goal of the conference, and ultimately this book, was to reach beyond description and quantification of spatial heterogeneity and address its relevance to ecosystem function, i.e., when does it matter and when does it not. If and when it matters, what are the conceptual tools that will enable us to deal with it effectively? The conference promoted a concentrated discussion with a group of experienced and talented scientists crossing several disciplines. The discussions themselves were, no doubt, lively, involved, and, perhaps, numbing. But the editors and authors have managed to bring to the table a clear, well-articulated synthesis in the form of this book. I, for one, welcome it with much gratitude.

The book is divided into five sections that progress from an analysis of the challenges and conceptual approaches to spatial heterogeneity, to discipline-based perspectives, case studies, and applications, and finally to a synthesis offered from multiple perspectives. The leading chapter, in addition to introducing the book’s focus, wisely drafts out a few key concepts and definitions for terms that often have conflicting interpretations. Each section is introduced with a short essay linking the papers to the broader context and objectives of the book. This judicious effort by the editors creates an effective framework for readers.

The section entitled “Challenges and conceptual approaches” has the most demanding task of all, to define a conceptual

framework for research on spatially explicit ecosystem function. The ecological community has spent precious little time in this area. Ecosystem ecology has made significant progress in understanding principal mechanisms and dynamics of many processes, but little theory has developed on ecological function that is spatially explicit. Landscape ecology has contributed methods in quantifying spatial heterogeneity, and has gained new insights into the role of heterogeneity in disturbance ecology and population dynamics; but only a few landscape studies have considered ecosystem function. In the section’s first paper, Turner and Chapin suggest a practical organizing framework to link ecosystem and landscape ecology by distinguishing two classes of processes (point and lateral) in heterogeneous landscapes. White and Brown focus on the quantification of pattern to deduce process using concepts and mathematical tools drawn from physics, earth science, biology, and ecology. Pastor takes a “process to pattern” tack with his focus on physical disturbance, directional flows, and diffusive instability, but he introduces a valuable emphasis on the feedbacks between ecosystem components. This brings a more integrated discussion to the table, and is an effective lead into the final paper on interactions and feedbacks. Reiners’ conceptual model describing landscape flows in heterogeneous space leaves a sense of a fluid environment, dynamic in form. He asserts that “such a vision would return ecology to the spatial and geographic science that it once was,” although, I would add, with a deeper wisdom of function.

The second section explores perspectives from disciplines that are only tangentially related to ecosystem science, but with enough common issues to be informative. Representatives of population ecology, hydrology, epidemiology, and oceanography were asked to discuss how spatial heterogeneity is treated in their respective disciplines, particularly in conceptual and mathematical models. These papers require deeper study by ecologists; they contain useful strategies and insights that are directly applicable to the problem of ecosystem heterogeneity. For instance, the relative influence of landscape composition and configuration important to issues of population persistence must also weigh in on studies of ecosystem processes, particularly in sampling and scaling strategies. Notably, the term *parsimony* recurs among these papers to describe model design. Incorporating spatial heterogeneity into ecosystem process models is complex, and prudent simplification is a crucial issue.

The “case study” approach of the third section provides a wide view of the drivers and consequences of heterogeneity across different ecosystems. As noted by the editors, these systems range from those that exhibit important and long-studied heterogeneity and those in which linkages between heterogeneity and ecosystem function have yet to be explored. These papers are all well-written explorations of the interactions of biotic and abiotic factors in different ecosystems and their relative influence on heterogeneity. They provide abundant detail and stimulating discussions on the linkages between heterogeneity and ecosystem function as they are currently understood (or not). Several authors offer their perspectives on conceptual frameworks that may generalize from their focal ecosystems interesting and useful companions to the first section’s discussions.

The fourth section addresses the implications of spatial heterogeneity for natural resource management in the areas of wildland fire, freshwater systems, and conservation planning.

All three papers recognize, explicitly or implicitly, that understanding patterns is essential for prioritizing management activities. Without acknowledging the interplay of spatial heterogeneity and ecosystem function, management approaches generalized for a homogeneous landscape may disrupt natural dynamics (e.g., fire regimes), ecosystem services (e.g., water quality), and population connectivity (e.g., species viability). Seeing management challenges for a selection of resources discussed side by side like this underscores the pressing need to understand ecosystem heterogeneity; this is not solely an academic issue.

The editors did not leave the final synthesis to a single chapter prepared by themselves, but included four additional and valuable perspectives. These chapters provide a wonderfully balanced synthesis of the commonalities and challenges seen at the workshop and within this collection of papers. Strikingly, the redundancies among these syntheses are minimal. Each author's reflections provide additional depth on the issues at hand and stimulate thinking on future directions for research. The editors close with a chapter aimed to help us navigate the conceptual frameworks proffered throughout the book. Given the absence of a linking, overarching framework, their "half-built" house analogy aptly

describes the state of the science, in which some "rooms" are well developed, others drafty, and others lack walls altogether.

In summary, this is a brilliantly coherent volume (the editors have done a superlative job) that tackles the difficult union of ecosystem science and landscape ecology. This book should be read by anyone interested in, befuddled by, or concerned in any way with ecosystem heterogeneity. Certainly, a "roof" that offers a unifying and synthetic framework is a goal of ecologists, but having some assistance in navigating this "half-built" house will go a long way in advancing our understanding of ecosystem function in heterogeneous landscapes.

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LEARNING TO CONVERSE AT THE BIG TABLE

Macdonald, David, and Katrina Service, editors. 2007. **Key topics in conservation biology**. Blackwell Publishing, Malden, Massachusetts. xviii + 307 p. \$64.95, ISBN: 978-1-4051-2249-8 (alk. paper).

Key words: biodiversity; conservation; economics; management; threat; wildlife.

During the holidays, my family gathers around as many tables as we can squeeze into our dining rooms to celebrate the holidays. Space is inevitably limited and as a universal rule, all the kids get stuck together at a flimsy table placed in the back corner of the adjacent room. The adults talk about adult things at their table, and the kids are left to surreptitiously throw peas at the adults from their little marginalized table. For quite awhile we conservation biologists were stuck at the "kid's" table in the great world debates while the "adults" conversed at their table about poverty alleviation, development initiatives, economic reforms, and social strife. After years of arguing that we belonged at the adult table, we have finally been offered a place (albeit on the very end squished between some other newcomers).

Key topics in conservation biology, a new volume edited by David Macdonald and Katrina Service, picks up the story from here. The theme of the volume is that along with the opportunity to enter these great world debates comes increased expectations. Emerging from the "green ghetto" we find ourselves engaging in conversations about how preservation of biodiversity is linked to economics, poverty alleviation, and social strife. These are not easy conversations and being confronted with divergent viewpoints challenges several of the maxims we developed after years of discussion amongst ourselves. How do we respond as conservation biologists to

these challenges and, as a result of these conversations, how is the practice and study of conservation biology altered?

Macdonald and Service initially tackled these questions in a classroom setting. They developed a module within a broader integrative biology course at the University of Oxford that brought students and front-line researchers together to discuss key topics in the field of conservation biology. The approach taken was a smashing success with the students, leading the authors to formalize some of these discussions into chapters within a "key topics" textbook. The end result is an edited volume of 18 chapters, 17 of which tackle some aspect of conservation biology, with the final chapter providing an overview of the themes emerging from the collection of works.

If you have ever faced a classroom full of skeptical, stressed-out students you understand how hard it can be to capture their attention and get them to fully engage in the material you are presenting. Perhaps for this reason, the chapters were written as short, snappy reviews of larger topics that are quite compelling to read. The tone of the book is one of serious reflection on the pros and cons of various methodologies (e.g., modeling, technology, molecular genetics) or on the inter-disciplinary nature of many conservation issues (e.g., bushmeat trade, trophy hunting, introduced species). Indeed, the strength of the book lies in its willingness to engage across disciplines. This inter-disciplinarity is not the small stuff such as getting ecologists to talk with microbiologists, but the big stuff like getting ecologists to talk with political scientists, and vice versa.

There are some excellent chapters in the volume that provide concise and compelling summaries of complex issues. A few of these gems include a review of the relationship between global climate change and biodiversity conservation by Terry Root and colleagues; a summary of conservation priority-setting schemes by Georgina Mace and colleagues; a series of arguments in support of sport hunting contributing to conservation goals by Andrew J. Loveridge and colleagues; and a consideration of whether metapopulation models are

integral to conservation biology by Resit Akçakaya and colleagues. Other chapters were less compelling either because the treatment of the material was too superficial or because the authors resorted to gross over-generalizations in order to achieve the desired snappiness. On the whole, however, I found that the good clearly outweighed the bad.

A limitation to the volume was its narrow focus on vertebrate conservation. The book could easily have been titled, "Key topics in wildlife conservation." There was precious little on conserving plants or invertebrates and there was nothing on the conservation of freshwater or marine biodiversity. Geographically, the book references research or case studies in the usual English-speaking countries such as the U.S., the U.K., New Zealand and Australia, but there was also a welcome focus on research conducted in the Afro-tropics. Still, there are no discussions of conservation on islands or in the colder climes near the poles or at high elevations (with the obvious exception of the chapter on global climate change). Clearly these topics and places are worthy of discussion when considering modern, inter-disciplinary approaches to conservation biology. They could have easily fit into the broader framework of the volume. Their absence likely reflects the research interests of the authors and the need to provide some limits on the content. The authors seem to have opted for disciplinary breadth by including chapters on the economic value of biodiversity, animal welfare, and use of technology in conservation and this seems to have come at the expense of some taxonomic and geographic breadth.

Would I recommend this textbook for use in your class? Absolutely. Despite its limitations, the collection of chapters succeed in their primary goal of challenging students to think broadly, re-evaluate some of their preconceptions about how the world works, and pursue conservation research that adds significantly to the "big table" discussions about the state of the earth's living resources. This book is especially useful for graduate student courses as there is the presumption that the reader understands basic ecological principles. In addition, my experience with teaching graduate students is that they too

easily resort to arguing that "educating" those that disagree with them will solve conflicts. The chapters in this book illustrate that these conflicts are real and not easily dismissed. Chapter authors grapple with these conflicts in meaningful ways and, in so doing, illustrate that good science can be used to answer complex questions. The volume may also be useful for teaching conservation biology to non-majors since the chapters represent such inter-disciplinary breadth. Most undergraduates will see some of their interests represented in one or more of the chapters and, hopefully, also connect their interests to the fate of biodiversity. The instructor for such courses must be prepared to augment the chapter readings with lectures on basic ecological principles, however.

The final chapter by David Macdonald and colleagues takes a broad view over all the other chapters and comes away with 11 themes that they suggest all aspiring conservation biologists should consider. These range from the commonly stated theme of focusing on conservation across international boundaries to the uncommonly stated theme of increasing transparency within the discipline. I found this chapter to be quite interesting as it presented conservation biology as an inherently inter-disciplinary endeavor that not only deserved a seat at the "big table," but also should take a prominent location at that table. To fully realize this academic evolution, young conservation biologists must continue to produce good science while also engaging in deep conversations with those that do not necessarily agree that biodiversity conservation should be a priority. This is a tough task for any one of us, but it is far better than being stuck forever throwing peas.

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TROPICAL DEFORESTATION: A MULTIDISCIPLINARY PRIMER

Spray, Sharon L., and Matthew D. Moran, editors. 2006. **Tropical deforestation.** Exploring Environmental Challenges: A Multidisciplinary Approach. Rowman and Littlefield, New York. xviii + 193 p. \$72.00 (cloth), ISBN: 978-0-7425-3481-0 (alk. paper); \$24.95 (paper), ISBN: 978-0-7425-3482-7 (alk. paper).

Key words: deforestation drivers; economics; governance; landscape ecology; political science; soil science; tropical ecosystems.

Tropical deforestation is a compact book designed to give undergraduate students in environmental science a broad-based perspective on the manifold threats facing tropical forests and their biota. Co-edited by a political scientist, Sharon Spray, and a biologist, Matthew Moran, it is part of a book series on environmental challenges that includes other works on global

climate change, loss of biodiversity, and wetlands (all co-edited by Spray and Karen McGlothlan).

The novelty of *Tropical deforestation* is that it explicitly attacks the vexing problem of rampant forest loss from distinct perspectives, including biological sciences (ecology, biogeography, landscape ecology), physical sciences (soil science, geography), and social sciences (economics, political science). This multifaceted approach largely works, and there is just enough conceptual overlap among the chapters to reinforce key concepts.

I found much to praise, and not a great deal to criticize, in this book. First, the negatives: the book has few illustrations or photos, which could have enhanced the presentation; and several odd factoids appear here and there, especially in the introductory chapter by Matthew Moran on tropical forest diversity and complexity. Moran is not a tropical ecologist, and his inexperience sometimes shows. For example, he erroneously suggests that the biomass of vines and epiphytes can exceed that of their host trees; that climate change is driving recent declines of high-elevation tropical amphibians (now mainly attributed to an exotic fungal pathogen, or at best a pathogen-climate

interaction); and that the Amazon has 6–10 major centers of endemism (Amazonian endemism is probably far more complex, with the locations of earlier, putative centers of endemism having been greatly influenced by collecting artifacts and debatable views of Pleistocene refugia). My sense is that the other, more-specialized chapters in the book lack such outdated concepts, though some were beyond my area of expertise.

These weaknesses seem minor compared to the many strengths of the book. Mark Cochrane provides a readable and largely up-to-date overview of tropical forest conversion, describing in some detail the processes of large-scale deforestation, slash-and-burn farming, logging, forest fragmentation, and fire. His explanation of the devastating effects of rainforest fires is particularly compelling, as is his discussion of development pressures in the Amazon. Cochrane describes the dramatic growth of industrial logging in Brazilian Amazonia during the late 1990s, although recent estimates using high-resolution remote sensing suggest it has become even more widespread since then.

Cochrane's chapter is followed by a geochemical perspective on tropical soils by Deborah McGrath and Ken Smith. The authors do a good job both of surveying tropical soil science—a vast subject—as well as piercing several common myths about soils in the tropics (such as the misplaced notion that nearly all tropical soils have low fertility or become baked laterites when cleared of vegetation). Their description of how prevailing land uses, like slash-and-burn farming and pasture conversion, alter key soil properties is particularly useful.

The next chapter, by Peter Klepeis, provides a human-geographer's view of tropical deforestation. He begins with a synopsis of geographical concepts and tools, particularly remote sensing and GIS, and summarizes the practical challenges of accurately measuring the pace of tropical deforestation—such as the lack of adequate baseline data and inconsistent definitions of forest cover and loss. He also highlights current research on the drivers of deforestation, and correctly emphasizes that such drivers can vary greatly among regions and at different spatial scales. I was, however, disappointed not to see the outstanding book by Thomas Rudel mentioned or included in his suggested-reading list (2005. *Tropical forests: regional paths of destruction and regeneration in the late twentieth century*. Columbia University Press, New York). As in the preceding chapter, Klepeis takes pains to skewer some common misconceptions, such as the view that most old-growth tropical forests are “virgin.”

The following chapter, by Erin Sills and Subhrendu Pattanayak, provides a lucid overview of theory and practice in natural-resource economics. This includes standard concepts such as externalities, discount rates, and perverse incentives, as well as different approaches for assessing the marginal net benefits of forests and agriculture, which in turn determine the

likelihood that any particular parcel of land will be deforested. Building on this foundation, the authors survey current research on the economic drivers of tropical deforestation, focusing on factors at national, regional, and household scales. In this context they discuss, among other factors, the effects of trade liberalization, road access, external debt, forest and agricultural commodity prices, population density, and log-export bans on deforestation, concluding that roads and commodity prices are the two most consistent predictors of forest loss.

The penultimate chapter, by Doris Fuchs, focuses on international relations. She discusses the evolving roles of global institutions, such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and U.N. Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), in decisions affecting forests. While surveying key international treaties, she emphasizes the daunting challenges involved in convincing industrial and developing nations alike to make real sacrifices for forest conservation (“Every single international initiative on forests produced a last-minute agreement to keep talking”). She also describes the growing role of nongovernmental organizations and of private-public partnerships, such as the Forest Stewardship Council, in forestry and forest conservation. Overall, she provides a balanced and valuable synopsis of international initiatives to promote forest governance.

The final chapter, by the editors Spray and Moran, emphasizes how challenges for forest conservation vary among the tropical regions of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Perhaps more than any other, this chapter gives a sense of the pungent realities—war, corruption, burgeoning external debt, pressures from international lenders, market economics, globalization—that can buffet developing nations and impact their forests. The authors also provide insightful thoughts on the potential advantages (and a few disadvantages) of democratic governments and institutions for forests.

In summary, *Tropical deforestation* will fill an important niche: the need for a relatively quick, accessible overview of a complex environmental issue, written from a variety of perspectives. It will unquestionably be of value for undergraduates in environmental studies programs and, even as a veteran tropical ecologist, I found it a useful and sometimes novel synthesis.

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