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Additional Reading

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(Continued from page 401)

tion to their application to wildlife conservation, assembly rules may be applied to a major unsolved problem in theoretical ecology—the problem of coping with complexity.

Theoretical ecology has dealt mainly with one-dimensional systems. Competition studies model one species competing against another although, as evidenced by Diamond’s work on community structures, this model is not always appropriate. Many species act together to compete against other groups of species. Niches may also depend upon several variables rather than upon a single variable (such as food size) analyzed by MacArthur and May. The development and analysis of multidimensional models presents a challenging problem for theoretical ecologists.

Theories of community structure and island biogeography are now being extended to other fields of research such as anthropology and epidemiology. John Terrell of the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago is applying results from theoretical ecology to studies of the evolution of human populations. Joel Cohen of Harvard University has developed a probabilistic model of malaria epidemics based on the concept that species already on an island (in this case, the host for the malaria protozoan) affect the subsequent establishment of other species on that island. Such applications of theoretical ecology promise to enrich both other fields of research and theoretical ecology. For example, Montgomery Slatkin of the University of Chicago and his colleagues have extended Cohen’s model to describe colonization by species with high extinction rates (such as insects) in situations where the colonists come from other habitats within the system.

The unsolved problems in theoretical ecology are many, but Diamond, for one, is optimistic about the future. He compares the state of theoretical ecology today to molecular biology 15 years ago—new concepts and techniques for research have recently been developed, and, he believes, the next two decades will see the completion of a revolution in the study of ecosystems.