

concern is the laudable endeavor to emphasize the strengths and achievements of Japanese science during these years, rather than to join the large chorus of critics, both Western and Japanese, of pre-war Japanese science.

With its 55 pages of endnotes and its rich and sometimes overwhelming detail, the book is not an easy one to read. Moreover, its focus on science rather than engineering and technology means that developments in private industry and in private educational institutions receive somewhat short shrift. And since the book ends with 1920, with only a very brief concluding chapter that surveys subsequent developments, the crucial interwar, wartime, and Occupation years remain uncovered by any comprehensive English-language treatment. But to ask Bartholomew to cover these topics as well would be asking him to write a second book—which indeed we must hope he does.

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## The Conservation Scene

### Conservation for the Twenty-First Century.

DAVID WESTERN and MARY C. PEARL, Eds. Oxford University Press, New York, 1989. xxvi, 365 pp., illus. \$36.95. Based on a conference, New York, Oct. 1986.

Extinction is a natural process. Millions of species have become extinct. Why, then, are conservation biologists so worried about current extinction rates?

First, estimates of current extinction rates are hundreds, possibly thousands, of times higher than the “background” rate of about one species per year over the past 600 million years. Second, many past species became extinct by evolving into new species—today, species are ceasing to exist without leaving descendants. Third, the present extinction crisis extends to most major categories of species, including terrestrial plants, which escaped relatively unharmed through many past mass-extinction episodes. Finally, human activities are undeniably the cause of most current extinctions.

Growing awareness of and concern about these facts among scientists have led to the emerging discipline of conservation biology and a plethora of conferences and books devoted to conservation biology, biodiversity, endangered species, and tropical rainforests. *Conservation for the Twenty-First Century* is the result of one such conference organized by Wildlife Conservation International, part of the New York Zoological

Society. Focusing on wildlife, the conference drew together an unusually wide range of participants—scientists, planners, managers, philosophers, media representatives, lawyers, government employees, and representatives of national and international non-governmental organizations from around the world. Their goals were to review the diversity of approaches to conserving nature, to assess the prospects for wildlife and habitat, and to identify the approaches and techniques that will be required for wildlife conservation through the coming century.

Because of this breadth, the volume would be a good choice for any scientist wanting an introduction to the conservation scene in the final decade of the 20th century—the magnitude of the problems, the scientific controversies, the organizations, and the literature. Although the book contains contributions from such stalwarts of the conservation biology movement as Diamond, Ehrenfeld, Eisenberg, Hales, Harris, Myers, Soulé, and Wilson, it is not limited to biology. After all, humans are the problem, and biologists are not experts on ways to change human behavior. As Western and several other contributors stress, conservation is linked to improving human welfare, especially in the tropics.

Many of the most biological chapters show that research relevant to wildlife conservation, contrary to the views of some in academia, can be good science as well. For example, Olson summarizes studies of fossil birds on oceanic islands, which demonstrate the shocking number of bird species that became extinct as a result of human colonizations. In the Hawaiian Islands alone, prehistoric anthropogenic extinctions were extensive, amounting to 50 species, nearly 51% of the native land birds. An additional 17 species of birds have become extinct in the historic period. Thus 69% of Hawaiian birds have become extinct since human colonization of the islands—and most of the remaining species are endangered.

Vrijenhoek, in a chapter on population genetics and conservation, summarizes his studies of genetic diversity and fitness in topminnows, genus *Poeciliopsis*. Closely related sexual and asexual forms coexist in the same desert springs. The sexual, but not the asexual, forms lose heterozygosity after drought-related reductions in population size. The demonstration that this loss of heterozygosity results in reduced developmental stability, reduced resistance to anoxic stress, and reduced competitive ability not only is of fundamental scientific interest but has resulted in improved recovery plans for several endangered topminnows. Unfortunately, as Vrijenhoek points out, there have

been genetic studies of only a few endangered species. One problem is the difficulty of funding such studies. As he puts it (p. 89), “Genetic research is costly, and most of our time is spent in more fundable studies, involving economically or medically important species, or on basic research that attacks currently popular theories.”

Woodruff’s chapter, “The problems of conserving genes and species,” underscores the challenge facing conservation biologists in this regard. Woodruff estimates that, if sound conservation is based on knowledge of the genetics, ecology, and behavior of a species, then we now have the scientific knowledge to manage about 100 species. He predicts that about 10,000 species will need such management by 2100.

Species can be managed wherever they occur naturally, in parks or nature reserves, or in zoos and botanical gardens. Conway has estimated that the cost of species conservation goes up from 10- to 10,000-fold at each of these progressively more intensive levels of management. Walker (p. 130) urges that “conservationists should spend less time worrying about the persistence of particular plant or animal species and begin to think instead about maintaining the nature and diversity of the ecosystem processes.” This is no doubt the most sensible and cost-effective approach. But are we to abandon species, such as the California condor (*Gymnogyps californianus*) and the black-footed ferret (*Mustela nigripes*), that are in such critical condition that they can only be saved by captive breeding and intensive management?

The final chapter of the book, “An agenda for conservation action,” identifies many areas in which research is needed. Those seeking inspiration for a thesis topic or new research project should also consult the report of an NSF-sponsored workshop organized by the Society for Conservation Biology published under the title *Research Priorities in Conservation Biology* (Island Press, Covelo, CA, 1989).

Although crystal balls are always murky, and the contributors to this volume foresee a variety of futures, all agree that the human population will continue to grow and that pressures on wildlife and habitat will increase. The nature of the world in 2100 will depend on decisions made today. Keystone people, as well as a better understanding of keystone species, will be required if wildlife is to be a part of that 21st-century world. The editors obviously hope that their book will reach some keystone people. Me too.

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