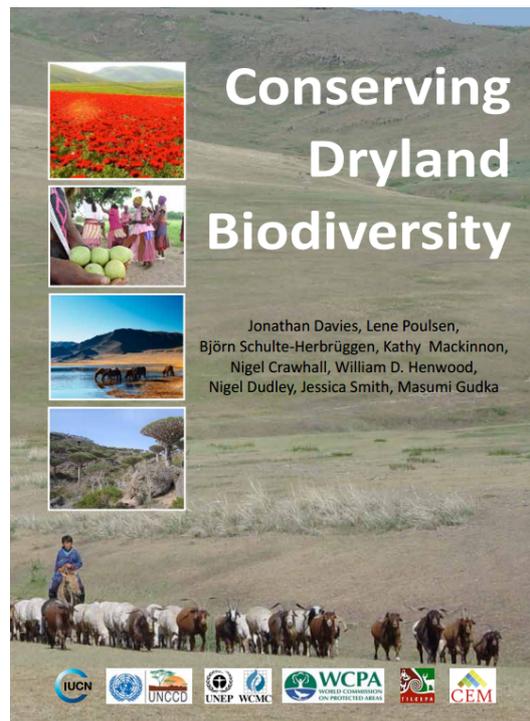


BOOK REVIEW



Conserving Dryland Biodiversity Davies, J., Poulsen, L., Schulte-Herbrüggen, B., Mackinnon, K., Crawhall, N., Henwood, W.D., Dudley, N., Smith, J. and Gudka, M. 2012. International Union for the Conservation of Nature. xii +84p Free (E-Book): http://www.iucn.org/about/union/commissions/cem/cem_resources/other_cem_publications_and_papers/?uPubsID=4715 ISBN 978-2-8317-1541-4

Conserving Dryland Biodiversity pitches itself as a book to “raise awareness” and “galvanise wider action to boost drylands conservation”; a task which it does with relative ease.

Published by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and freely available to interested parties online the report provides a synthesis of the current issues faced by global drylands and makes suggestions for the future direction of their conservation. Intended as a

call to action, this richly illustrated text is written at a level that should be considered inclusive of all.

Despite its inclusivity with which the book is written the authors do well to incorporate relevant and up to date research identified from across the global dryland regions to provide an effective synthesis of the topic. Richly illustrated throughout, the reader is led through the books four sections along an almost chronological journey, starting with the accumulation of evolutionary history as represented by the current status of dryland biodiversity through to predicting and safeguarding the future for global drylands.

I was particularly impressed with the section: *the richness of dryland biodiversity* I must confess that prior to reading this book my knowledge of these regions was less than I would like to have admitted, but this section proved an excellent crib sheet. For example, despite obviously being water limited environments I was particularly surprised to learn that they provide suitable habitats for 25% of the recognised global amphibian species. However, the real highlight for me in this section was gaining a much better understanding of the complex interplay between people and dryland habitats. Their value to the 5 billion people who live outside these areas in addition to their 2 million inhabitants cannot be understated. The book brings home how these regions have proved a significant source of many agricultural crop varieties and livestock species and still may provide an important refuge for future cultivars, despite limited existing protection.

For me though, the real value of this text comes from its attempts to galvanise thinking about future preservation of dryland habitats as being one reflecting the ecological and social realities of these regions. Conservation tensions exist between the extractive value of resources these areas hold at a government level and the needs and desires of local and indigenous communities. What this book does well is highlight how long term preservation of

these regions requires looking to the adaptive behaviours of local communities to inform future wide-scale management of these ecosystems. At a local scale communities have learned to adapt to the limiting conditions of dryland regions and work in tandem with them, rather than try to alter the environment to suit their practices. For me it feels like this is the central tenet of this book – how can we preserve ecosystem function and services by adopting local scale techniques at regional levels.

And this is where the book really becomes a call to action, in the final section highlights the need for an integrated approach to biodiversity conservation through active development of food and water security initiatives and concurrently building resilience into functional ecosystems by improved dryland ecosystem planning. What this book does is signpost a future direction for dryland conservation and recognises the importance of long term strategic planning to achieve this goal. The problem this left me with was reconciling that long-term planning with the typically short-term vision of those that hold the conservation purse strings...

Angelo P. Pernetta

Biogeography and Ecology Research Group,

University of Brighton in Hastings, United Kingdom.

E-mail: a.pernetta@brighton.ac.uk

© 2013 Angelo P. Pernetta