

BOOK REVIEW

Bawa, K. S., Primack, R. B. and Oommen, M. A. (2011). *Conservation Biology: a Primer for South Asia*. xiv + 589 pages. Universities Press (India) Pvt. Ltd. Hyderabad, India. ISBN: 978-81-7371-7246.

This introductory book on conservation biology, although called a 'primer', is a comprehensive text book that could be prescribed for both undergraduate and postgraduate level courses on the subject in South Asia. It explores basic concepts, underlying principles and in particular, the approaches of conservation biology practiced by diverse local communities in South Asia. Quite aptly, the authors highlight the emerging trends of conservation science, which is increasingly becoming interdisciplinary within the domains of both natural and social sciences, although the emphasis of this book is largely on biology. The first four chapters are based on Richard Primack's highly popular book 'A Primer of Conservation Biology', now in its fifth edition and translated into many languages. In the current book, the authors have included new sections, some within 'boxes', and as far as possible used examples from South Asia, home to some of the world's richest and at the same time most threatened biota now largely concentrated in biodiversity hotspots in the Himalayas, Western Ghats, Sri Lanka and Andaman and Nicobar islands.

Chapter 1 of the book introduces the modern discipline of conservation biology and traces its origin, and the global and regional significance. It then addresses the distribution of biological diversity, patterns of extinction and economic value, including the ethical value of biodiversity. Chapter 2 deals comprehensively with the major threats to biological diversity, outlining the consequences of its extinction rates across multiple scales, ecosystems and realms, and then all forms of human-induced drivers of decline and degradation of biological diversity. Chapter 3 introduces some key concepts: species and population level conservation, the consequences of their decline and global initiatives towards addressing these impacts. In chapter 4, the concepts of conserving biological diversity both within and outside the variously designated protected areas are examined, along with the scientific underpinnings of designing and managing the conservation landscape. It also introduces concepts such as reconciliation ecology, which in fact is the maintenance of biodiversity in human-dominated landscapes, a topic of enormous significance to South Asia.

The next three chapters are entirely new. They impart a regional flavor highlighting examples from South Asia. Chapter 5 addresses the role of local communities and the principles and processes of community-based conservation. It unfolds a succinct

description of different models of community-based conservation, requirements for its success and the limitations of these approaches. Chapter 6 outlines the role of laws, policies and institutions for biodiversity conservation at the levels of species, ecosystems and landscapes, and the strategies at various institutional levels for their effective implementation. Both the national legislation and international treaties, which play an increasingly important role in the conservation of biological diversity, are described herein. Building upon the principles and approaches, so lucidly dealt with in chapters 1-6, the authors with their extensive experience and expertise, identify the current research needs that are essential for conservation of biological diversity in the South Asian region in chapter 7, the final chapter of the book. Here, the authors emphasize the importance of identifying gaps in research and the human impacts on different levels of biodiversity. These are essential prerequisites to science-based conservation planning, management and monitoring, which in turn will lead to the development of improved conservation policies and governance structures. Finally, the incorporation of key elements, such as interdisciplinarity, follow-up action, long-term planning and monitoring, and linkages with policy and governance that are vital for the success of conservation efforts, is recommended.

This book highlights the rapid decline in the biodiversity of the South Asian region. It emphasizes the need for urgent and concerted action, which involves participation of local communities, indigenous tribes and policy makers. It provides a framework for university-level teaching courses in conservation biology and is a rich source of ideas and stimuli for further research. Although the book includes all countries of South Asia, the examples are mainly from India where a large volume of data is currently available. The authors bring out a synthesis of most of the important research findings both within and outside the region with a concise summary and a comprehensive list of references at the end of each chapter. This, being an internationally acclaimed book adapted for the South Asian region, it is a valuable companion text book for students, teachers, researchers and others having a deeper interest in conservation biology of the region.

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