

REVIEW

T. C. WHITMORE: *An introduction to tropical rain forests*. Clarendon Press, Oxford (Oxford University Press), 1990, reprint with corrections 1991, 226 pp., photographs, text figs. Price £ 16.95. ISBN 0-19-854274-7 – ISBN 0-19-854276-3 (paperback).

This book seems to belong to – and certainly should be used side by side with – the late Marius Jacobs' "The tropical rain forest – a first encounter" (Dutch version 1981; English edition 1988, 295 pp.), as it has much the same design and contents, and is similarly richly illustrated; it also aims at a better understanding of the necessity in saving the forest for the future. The present volume somewhat more focuses on ecology proper, tries to explain it, and tells what is happening today with the forests, to a broad reading public which surely includes politicians and all kinds of tropical scientists. There is a glossary, and for readers further interested a list of references, and a general index.

The nicely executed book contains, as compared to Jacobs', much additional information, recently discovered facts, new results of forest research, and it offers new opinions on forest ecology, formulated and seen from a somewhat different angle, as by a forester. There is a panorama of most items of tropical rain forest ecology, covered by 10 chapters, with the following headings: An introduction to tropical rain forests – What are tropical rain forests? – Plant life – Rain forest animals – Interconnections between plants and animals/the web of life – Tropical rain forests through time – Forest dynamics – Nutrients and their cycles – Species richness – Tropical rain forests yesterday, today and tomorrow.

It appears that not always all the nutrients in a rain forest ecosystem are in a close circuit, but that, under certain conditions, they can be made up by minerals from the weathering base rock and by aerosol and rain, and hence that a sustainable forest exploitation may be possible. We learn that forests not always have been undisturbed for immense geological periods and still have developed their incredible species diversity, and thus, that some degree of disturbance by man could be tolerated. Faint positive tidings for the silent, waiting forests. But also the author knows and concludes about the great 'if's': the immediate change in the attitude of man, and bringing to a stop the human population growth, both requirements not to be touched upon. Jacobs made the same appeal ten years before, but nothing happened. Meanwhile we try the best, and Whitmore's book is most welcome to introduce the many underlying problems.

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