

REVIEW

N. MARK COLLINS, JEFFREY A. SAYER & TIMOTHY C. WHITMORE: *The conservation atlas of tropical forests: Asia and the Pacific*. Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1991. 256 pp., illus. Price £ 65.00. ISBN 0-333-53992-3.

This atlas is the first of a series of three intended to give a factual basis to the forest conservation debate and aims to present a rigorous scientific basis for the current debate about precious ecosystems.

In part I, the issues at stake are discussed with chapters amongst others on forest wildlife, people of the forest (the case of the forest people under threat is very sensibly discussed in this chapter), shifting cultivation, natural rain forest management, tropical timber trade, the protected areas system, etc. The chapters are written by many different authors, nicely illustrated with colour photographs, and maps and/or graphs where appropriate. At the end of each chapter references are given. This part alone is already unique in the amount of relevant information.

In part II all countries are discussed, each chapter beginning with a table giving land area, population, population growth, area of tropical rain forest, gross national product, and details on timber production and export. Of each country the forests, deforestation, management, mangroves where appropriate, biodiversity, and conservation areas are discussed in detail, with an ample amount of tables on areas of different kinds of forest, and of conservation areas. Separately, in a box, special issues related to forest are discussed, like the great forest fire of Borneo and Medicinal plants of Xishuangbanna. The chapters are accompanied by colour maps of the countries with its different kinds of forests and its conservation areas. The maps are made with G.I.S., compiled from satellite images. "But even with the latest advances of remote sensing it is not always possible to distinguish between undisturbed closed canopy rain forest and forests regenerating after shifting cultivation or logging" as Martin Holdgate states in his foreword. This certainly is true, as the maps in several cases seem much too optimistic. But generally this is corrected in the text, where an estimate is made of the real amount of destruction.

If there is any criticism it would be that the text is not always congruent, being written by many different authors. It is obvious that a forester still has a different attitude on the possibility of sustainable logging in natural rain forest than an ecologist. In the chapter on shifting cultivation in part I it is said that shifting cultivation may have its origin in the northern reaches of mainland Southeast Asia. But from the chapter in part II on Papua New Guinea it appears that shifting cultivation there is about from the same age.

This really is a unique guide to the precious resources of our tropical forests, as the press release says. The book may serve as a reference book for all people involved not only in conservation issues, but in a large variety of subjects related to the tropical forest, the countries where it occurs, and its people.

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