

REVIEW

N.L. MCKENZIE, R.B. JOHNSTON & P.G. KENDRICK (Eds.): Kimberley rainforests of Australia. Surrey Beatty & Sons, Chipping Norton, NSW 2170, 1991. xviii + 490 pp., many illus. Hardcover. Price unknown. ISBN 0-949-32441-8.

The Kimberley is an extremely rugged area in NW Australia extending over 170,000 square kilometers. It has always been one of the biologically unknown wilderness areas of the world. The presence of rainforest in this part of the continent was not even known before 1965. In 1986 a three-year exploration was started to unravel its mysteries. The results of this study are laid down in the present volume which deals with a variety of subjects, such as: soil, vegetation, floristics, landsnails, scorpions, spiders, insects, amphibians, reptiles, birds, mammals and nature conservation.

The forest is of the monsoon type and consists of a number of patches varying from a clump of a few trees to 100 hectare. In many places these patches are continuous with mangrove or riverine forest. The total area of rainforest is only 0.005 percent of the Kimberley region. According to Malesian standards the flora is relatively poor: 453 species are on record. The fact that all but one (*Hibiscus peralbus*) of these are wide-spread in tropical Australia, most of them even outside Australia, suggests that this vegetation type is recent.

Despite the extreme ruggedness, the lack of an infrastructure and the low population density, flora and fauna have suffered losses through human activities. These started 40,000 years ago and have strongly increased in the last century by the introduction of cattle. Damage by livestock favours the growth of grasses which in turn increases the susceptibility to fire.

To preserve the diversity a number of (additional) reserves are proposed.

The book is amply illustrated by black-and-white and colour photographs, maps, tables, species lists, etc., by which the reader gets a very good idea of this fascinating part of the world.

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