January 2001

Review of Encyclopedia of the Biosphere: Humans in the Worlds Ecosystems

John Stephen Brantley
Eastern Illinois University, jsbrantley@eiu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://thekeep.eiu.edu/lib_fac

Part of the Ecology and Evolutionary Biology Commons, and the Library and Information Science Commons

Recommended Citation
http://thekeep.eiu.edu/lib_fac/59

This is brought to you for free and open access by the Booth Library at The Keep. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Research & Creative Activity by an authorized administrator of The Keep. For more information, please contact tabruns@eiu.edu.

**Subjects:** Nature-Effects of Human Beings On-Encyclopedias; Biosphere-Encyclopedias; Ecosystem Management-Encyclopedias.

**Reviewer:** Steve Brantley, Resident Librarian, University of Illinois at Chicago Library, jbrant1@uic.edu

**Table of Contents:**

Volume 1: Our Living Planet

Volume 2: Tropical Rainforests

Volume 3: Savannas

Volume 4: Deserts

Volume 5: Mediterranean Woodlands

Volume 6: Temperate Rainforests

Volume 7: Deciduous Forest

Volume 8: Prairies and Boreal Forest

Volume 9: Lakes, Islands, and the Poles

Volume 10: Oceans and Seashores

Volume 11: The Biosphere Concept and Index

This beautifully illustrated 11-volume encyclopedia brings together knowledge spanning all the earth and biological sciences with the purpose of establishing connections between these discreet fields. The idea of the biosphere is that the earth is a unified entity in which all life and geological processes have been interconnected since the beginning of the planet's formation. The encyclopedia breaks down ecosystems into nine regions based on their similarities of climate, flora, fauna and relative proximity to bodies of water. The nine volumes are book-ended with volumes dealing with the entire planet and the concept of the biosphere respectively. The first volume focuses on the evolution of the planet's geology and all life. Attention is given to the evolution of humanity and human society, but not to
the detriment of explanations of other types of life. The final volume presents the history of
the idea and a subject index to the entire set.

The encyclopedia stresses the interconnectivity of distinct plants and animals, and does an
especially good job of illustrating the spread of species across the earth with the use of
maps, charts, and well-annotated photography or art. Any scientific encyclopedia will
provide such diagrams of evolution and physical spread over time, but where this
encyclopedia differs is in its connecting disparate fields of study (anthropology, geology,
botany, zoology, meteorology) into coherent combinations stressing similarities of evolution.
The effect of this combination is to suggest life processes on a global scale. Another central
theme in the work is the spread of human civilization into the various biomes and
bioclimatic regions, their use and affect on the regions and the detriment this use and
overuse has caused.

The volumes each contain a short introductory essay, and are organized around the themes
of physical description, life content, meteorological characteristics and human impact. This
organization, which also lacks a table of contents gives the encyclopedia the flavor of a
textbook rather than a reference work. To remedy this shortcoming somewhat, each volume
offers a species index and a thematic index, which acts as the table of contents. Placing this
‘index’ at the end of each volume rather than at the beginning is a strange choice. The
volumes also include a fair bibliography but not necessarily additional reading.

This is an excellent resource for the general reader or secondary school student. Its vast
coverage and effort in drawing attention to the interconnectedness of biologic, climatic, and
human processes is admirable and well done. The encyclopedia is also recommended for
public libraries and undergraduate reference collections, but it is not a research level
publication. It cannot cover the depth of scientific information that subject encyclopedias do
with greater ease, organization and detail.

To order this title, click here ISBN 0-7876-4506-0