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

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Ecology


**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

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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.

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