

# Preface

This book arose from the need to develop accessible research-based case study material which addresses contemporary issues and problems in the rapidly evolving field of human ecology. Academic, political, and, indeed, public interest in the environmental sciences is on the rise. This is no doubt spurred by media coverage of climate change and global warming and attendant natural disasters such as unusual drought and flood conditions, toxic dust storms, pollution of air and water, and the like. But there is also a growing intellectual awareness of the social causes of anthropogenic environmental impacts, political vectors in determining conservation outcomes, and the role of local representations of ecological knowledge in resource management and sustainable yield production. This is reflected in the rapid increase of ecology courses being taught at leading universities in the fast-growing developing countries much as was the case a decade or two ago in Europe and North America.

The research presented here is all taken from recent issues of *Human Ecology: An Interdisciplinary Journal*. Since the journal itself is a leading forum for contemporary research, the articles we have selected represent a cross-section of work which brings the perspectives of human ecology to bear on current problems being faced around the world. The chapters are organized in such a way to facilitate the use of this volume either to teach a course or to introduce an informed reader to the field. Basic issues and key concepts are introduced in the general Introduction and in Overviews to each of the four subsequent sections.

Section I deals with theoretical and methodological issues, notably what constitutes causal explanation, the risky use of metaphors in ecological discourse, and the importance of biocultural diversity and local knowledge. Section II addresses the dynamics of change in food procurement strategies, Section III takes on the causes and consequences of agricultural intensification, and Section IV concerns common property management, conservation, and public policy. If used in a classroom, this modular arrangement is easily adaptable to the purposes and nature of the course.

Foremost, we thank all the contributors, whose enthusiasm and cooperation have made this collection possible. All actively participated in the final editing, which has resulted in each chapter being a more concise but still an intellectually valid representation of the original article. Pete Vayda occupies an unrivaled place in the development of human ecology within the social sciences and as the founding edi-

tor of *Human Ecology* some 38 years ago. We owe him a great debt of gratitude. We are also very grateful to Bill Tucker, Teresa Krauss, and Katie Chalbako, our New York editors at Springer, and Ms P. Arthi Prianka, our Project Manager. Many thanks go to Ludomir Lozny, Managing Editor of *Human Ecology*, for his generous intellectual, technical and practical support. In addition, we thank Bill Baughman, Gary Clevidence, Nancy Flowers, David Gilmore, Greg Johnson, and Flora Lu for their assistance with the project.

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<http://www.springer.com/978-1-4419-5700-9>

Human Ecology

Contemporary Research and Practice

Bates, D.G.; Tucker, J. (Eds.)

2010, XIV, 377 p. 23 illus., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-1-4419-5700-9