

Publications

Serendipity: An Ecologist's Quest to Understand Nature by James A. Estes (2016), 275 pp., University of California Press, Oakland, USA. ISBN 978-0-520-28503-3 (hbk), USD 29.95, GBP 24.95.

In the original Persian tale, 'The travels and adventures of three princes of Serendip', there were three princes, but in this book that number has been reduced to only one, the author, Jim Estes. In the tale, the prince(s) travelled and had various adventures, making '... certain discoveries. Their adventures resulted from the use they made, and that other people made, of their keen wits; and their discoveries ... often proved valuable to those whom they encountered. ... In all these adventures they conducted themselves with great courtesy and modesty' (Merton & Barber, 2004, *The Travels and Adventures of Serendipity*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, USA).

Estes, a distinguished marine ecologist, may or may not have known of this Persian tale when he named this book but its description fits perfectly. *Serendipity* tells the story of the author's development as a scientist and the discoveries he had along the way. Throughout his long career serendipity influenced what Estes did, from failing the military's physical exam during the Vietnam War to a chance meeting with the ecologist Bob Paine. All of these incidents changed the path of his research and in some cases his career.

With a focus on sea otters in the north-east Pacific and their role as predators in the near-shore ocean, Estes' work was seminal in establishing the fact that sea otter predation on sea urchins is the powerful force maintaining kelp forests and that in the absence of otters, urchins eliminated the kelp. The majority of the book focuses on the author's fieldwork, and the methods, people and science that brought Estes to his famous conclusions about sea otters. He follows a few other lines of his research, finishing with his conclusion about the importance of top-down regulation of ecosystems. The book is mostly about ecology and science rather than conservation but there are clear lessons to be drawn from the material presented.

As Estes remarks, few scientists write about the events that shape their work—something that he has corrected in this book. As with the Princes of Serendip, Estes is a courteous and collaborative scientist whose work has helped frame the science of predator-prey ecology. The author's target for the book is students and young professionals, who will

learn that most careers are decidedly non-linear, and heavily influenced by chance and the ability to seize opportunity.

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Conservation Planning: Informed Decisions for a Healthier Planet by Craig R. Groves and Edward T. Game (2015), 608 pp., Roberts and Company Publishers Inc., Colorado, USA. ISBN 978-1-936221-51-6 (pbk), USD 42.00.

Conservationists often follow a well-worn path to problem solving. We begin by developing our own methods to analyse the available biological data, before discovering and embracing better approaches from other fields produced decades earlier. When our results are ignored we start collecting and incorporating more people-focused data, adopting another new suite of techniques. Finally, we recognize that long-term solutions require successful institutions and management systems, further broadening the scope of our work. Thus, the point at which a conservation approach matures is the point at which the related literature becomes overwhelming, especially for practitioners. This was certainly a problem for systematic conservation planning, widely regarded as the best approach for identifying and implementing conservation area networks. But in this case help is at hand, as the publication of *Conservation Planning: Informed Decisions for a Healthier Planet* means researchers and practitioners now have a comprehensive and accessible guide to this important topic.

Such a guide is welcome because protected areas and other area-based measures are a conservation mainstay, with hundreds of millions of dollars spent annually to increase their terrestrial, freshwater and marine coverage. Despite this, global biodiversity continues to decline, in part because of the poor targeting and implementation of our conservation actions. *Conservation Planning* shows how to overcome these limitations by providing a step-by-step guide through the process of deciding where and how to invest conservation resources. The opening chapter begins with an explanation of why this is important and provides a concise overview of the 'many forms of planning for nature conservation'. This illustrates the range of relevant systems, from land-use local planning to National

Biodiversity Strategy and Action Planning, all of which would benefit from more efficient and transparent approaches. The authors also explain how the book draws heavily on decision theory and decision science, which I found one of its great strengths—providing a solid conceptual framework for linking together the various elements.

With the background explained, the book contains a further 11 chapters grouped into three parts: Developing a conservation plan, Special topics in conservation planning, and Implementation and monitoring of conservation planning. The bulk of the chapters are in part one, which begins with a very wise chapter on getting started. This emphasizes the need to understand the planning context, involve the right people and develop an effective team. The subsequent chapters in this section go through the steps familiar to many conservation planners, but include a great breadth of information and insight. For example, Chapter 5 on Harnessing knowledge contains text boxes on finding data where there are none, data management, quantitative versus qualitative social data collection, making cost data comparable, and sections on getting better judgement from experts and incorporating traditional knowledge. Parts two and three contain two chapters each and cover incorporating climate change and ecosystem services in conservation planning, and implementation and evaluation.

This book is a comprehensive resource for anyone interested in conservation planning, whether they want to read about the latest literature on particular topics or are involved in the nitty-gritty of project design and implementation. Just as importantly, the book is a pleasure to read. The authors have decades of experience as distinguished conservation scientists who also work in implementation, and they have produced a book their colleagues will want to read. It is full of insights and interesting examples, is beautifully laid out, with lots of good photographs and informative graphics, and the key messages at the end of each chapter serve as useful reminders and guides. I strongly recommend this book to anyone interested in making better conservation decisions, and expect to see it placed within easy reach in offices around the globe.

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