

## BOOK REVIEWS

### **Soils: Their properties and management**

Editors: P.E.V. Chairman and B.W. Murphy

Publisher: Oxford University Press

This book is essentially a third substantially revised edition of a book originally put together as a guide for the soil conservationist. Its origins still show through, in as much as it contains little new theory or explanation of widespread soil degradation phenomena. However, this by no means detracts from its merit as a clearly presented explanatory text of use to both students and land managers. In fact, virtually all topics of relevance to soil science and soil conservation are given some coverage in its 23 chapters. However, because of the multi-author format many topics are covered in cursory, passing fashion in different chapters, which does not aid the comprehensive coverage of any of them.

The book commences with several chapters describing the properties of soil, erosion processes and rates of erosion related to rates of soil formation. Whilst the editors suggest that the book provides a comprehensive coverage of all forms of soils degradation, the processes and distribution of salinization, acidification, nutrient decline and structural degradation only merit very limited discussion in a chapter entitled "Other forms of degradation". I found the information provided on these topics very limited in scope, and somewhat frustrating because these "other" forms of degradation cost the farmer and country considerably more in terms of yield foregone than wind and water erosion combined. Furthermore, only two references are provided for further reading in this chapter.

Subsequent chapters deal with soil classification and mapping and soil distribution in New South Wales. I was disappointed to find no discussion of the appropriateness of different mapping scales for various purposes, nor any discussion of the merits of free versus other survey methods. Similarly, no mention is made of the principles and role of land evaluation, although rural and urban land capability assessment are briefly discussed. I also thought more information on practical farm planning would have been particularly appropriate in this text.

The latter chapters of the book deal with a wide range of topics concerning soils and land management. These vary in detail and quality, but provide at least an introductory coverage of soils related to farming practice, range management, earthworks, extractive industries and urban land uses. Furthermore, much of the material presented is clearly applicable outside New South Wales.

The book is extremely attractively presented and well illustrated, including several colour prints. It is to be recommended as a basic introductory text suitable for farmers, land managers, and non-specialist students. However, specialists will not find enough detail for their liking, a matter made worse by inadequate reference lists following several of the chapters.

Copies of the book can be obtained from Oxford University Press, G.P.O. Box 2784Y, Melbourne, 3001. Recommended retail price is \$39.95.

Colin Chartres  
CSIRO Division of Soil  
Canberra