BOOK REVIEWS

“The Greens” and “Green Fire”

“The Greens”, written by Bob Brown and Peter Singer introduces the Greens to a wide audience. Both authors were Green candidates for the Australian Senate at the time of writing. Bob Brown is one of the founders of the Australian Greens. As director of the Tasmanian Wilderness Society, he led the campaign that saved the Franklin River from impoundment for a hydroelectric scheme, and was a member of the Tasmanian parliament from 1983–93. Brown was voted Australian of the Year in 1993 by The Australian newspaper, and in 1990 won the prestigious Goldman Environmental Prize. Peter Singer is Australia’s leading public philosopher and the author of award winning and best selling non-fiction Animal Liberation and How are We to Live? At the time of writing he was Professor of Philosophy and Deputy Director of the Centre for Human Bioethics at Monash University, Melbourne.

During 1980, Dr Norm Sanders was elected as an Australian Democrat to the seat of Denison in Hobart, the greenest seat in Tasmania. In all but label, Sanders was Australia’s first Green member of Parliament. Sanders resigned in 1982 and his seat was taken up by Bob Brown. In 1986, Dr Jerry Bates, a lecturer in environmental law, was elected to the Tasmanian parliament on an “Independent” ticket with Bob Brown. Brown and Bates began using the label “Greens Independents” in 1987. The Sydney Greens became the first nationally registered Greens Party in 1983. State Green parties were formed in Queensland in 1985 and in South Australia in 1989. On Sunday, August 30, 1992, New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania agreed to join to form the Australian Greens. In 1993, the Australian Capital Territory Greens joined, followed by the Victorian Greens and then the (Northern) Territory Greens in 1995. The Australian Greens have also established in South Australia and there is also a Greens party in Western Australia.

“The Greens” is an introduction to Green politics for anyone who is interested in joining, supporting or simply finding out more about this alternative political force in Australian politics. The book is divided into two sections. Part 1 begins with an introduction to the environmental crisis and the major environmental issues facing the world. This is followed by a discussion of ethics, in which Green ethics are contrasted to the dominant political ethic of growth and development. Part 2 begins with an introduction to who the Greens are, and why, where and how they began. This is followed by an introduction to the new politics that the authors’ would like to see emerge given Green representation in parliament. A chapter on “Green economies” introduces the reader to the authors’ views on economic growth, employment, free trade, taxation and small business. Other Green policies discussed include the environment, social justice, health, education, income security, respect for diversity, and a just society in a just world. Notably though, policy on important issues such as immigration and population control are not mentioned, and other major political issues are discussed only briefly. The views expressed are those of the authors’, it is not a formal or official statement of Green policy. These views are considered generally consistent with the policies of the Australian Greens. Where Green policy has not yet been formulated the authors’ have not hesitated to express their views. “The Greens”, having been prepared prior to the 1996 federal election, establishes a basis upon which an individual may decide as to the viability of Green representation in parliament. To the individual who takes a strong ethical stance for the environment and social justice, this book presents a convincing argument for voting Green. It points out weaknesses inherent in the dominant political parties and system, and provides solid rationale for the transformation of politics and Green government.

Given that this is the first book about the Australian Greens since they were formally established in 1992, a higher degree of detail and incorporation of Green policy on a wider range of issues may have been beneficial to the underlying goals of the authors’. Its simplicity does however, make the book accessible to a wide audience. It is a successful introduction to the views and opinions of two prominent Green politicians, representing the views of the larger political party. By introducing the Greens to a wide audience this book may assist in the ultimate Green goal, that is, to transform politics and bring about Green government.

Ian Cohen, author of “Green Fire”, was the first Green member of the New South Wales Parliament. He has worked for the green movement since 1980 and has campaigned electorally for the Greens since 1984, his primary focus being the refinement of direct action tactics and the consolidation of broad-based people’s movement for social change. He is a founding member of a number of environmental organizations, including the Broken Head Protection Committee, Nightcap Action Group, Stop the Ocean Pollution, and the Clean Seas Coalition.

Green Fire is a series of stories about environmental action aimed at “helping to heal the planet” (p. 250). Cohen recounts his experiences as an environmental

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The system is based on the work for taxonomists and managers of biodiversity, and is now widely understood and employed in Australia. It incorporates a coding system for threat categories that is structured accordingly. The majority of its 466 pages are devoted to lists of taxa that are presumed extinct, endangered, vulnerable, rare or poorly known at the national level. The book fulfils such a need and represents an ideal method of nonviolent political action, within the environmental movement. Appendix II consists of "Ground Rules for Green Radicals" and explains how to organize for change. It highlights some of the activities that can be undertaken for the local and global environment.

Cohen’s aims in writing this book are not as immediately obvious as were Brown and Singer’s in “The Greens”. It appears that Cohen intended on painting a different and indeed more accurate picture of environmental protest, to that which has been flashed across media channels for over a decade. The text views the phenomena of action in defence of an ideal from the “front line”, not from a far removed viewpoint as usually presented by the media. It portrays an understanding for the passionate struggle, sometimes almost out-of-control, and at times deemed unacceptable by mainstream society and more conservative conservation organizations such as the Wilderness Society. Anecdotal sections appear to be aimed at allowing a deeper understanding of these types of events in the Australian context. Cohen creates an awareness of the importance of the activists’ struggles, and the victories which saved high conservation value areas and set important precedents for future events. The debate over methods used by front line environmental activists is ongoing, and those involved may find “Green Fire” a pertinent source of information.

I felt that Cohen successfully conveyed the meaning behind this series of entertaining yet heartfelt stories. It is a highly readable and enjoyable novel, and I would recommend it to anyone interested in the environmental movement or people seeking to instigate or facilitate environmental or social change. Cohen’s hope is that “the information provided here will encourage people to embark on their own projects, to save the world through liberation from powerlessness” (p. 250).

"The Greens" and “Green Fire” are both a means of increasing awareness within our society of the need for environmental protection. Singer and Brown hope to achieve this by informing the reader of the benefits of voting Green. The more people understand what Green politics is about, the better they will be able to make an informed decision regarding who should hold political power. “Greenfire”, uses the memoirs of a prominent environmental activist and Green politician, to improve the image of environmental activism. This in turn could improve the image of Green politics, which has been and is influenced by the involvement of environmental activists.

Rare or Threatened Australian Plants: 1995 Revised Edition

J. D. Briggs and J. H. Leigh, 1996
CSIRO Australia, Collingwood
x + 466 pp. ISBN 0 643 05798 6
RRP AUD$44.95

RAY FROEND

The future of Australia’s flora is dependent upon developing an understanding within the community and management of the need for conservation. A vital ingredient in achieving this understanding is the provision of accurate information on how many species are threatened or have already become extinct. Rare or Threatened Australian Plants (ROTAP): 1995 Revised Edition fulfils such a need and represents an up-to-date list of taxa that are presumed extinct, endangered, vulnerable, rare or poorly known at the national level.

The book is intended as a comprehensive reference work for taxonomists and managers of biodiversity, and is structured accordingly. The majority of its 466 pages are devoted to lists of rare and threatened species that incorporate a coding system for threat categories that is now widely understood and employed in Australia. The system is based on the IUCN threat category definitions and summarizes information on distribution, conservation status and size of reserved populations. Detailed notes are provided on coding system category definitions, changes to the coding system and correct application. A part of the book I considered particularly helpful were the examples of taxa in each conservation category. This assists the reader unfamiliar with previous editions of ROTAP to understand how the categories are applied. It should be noted that the IUCN categories have been reviewed over recent years, and the authors acknowledge that these changes will be considered for future editions of the ROTAP list.

In this new edition, there is both an Australian list of all taxa by family as well as separate State and Territory lists (including Christmas Island, Norfolk Island and Cocos Island). Information on each taxa in the lists includes genus, species (or infra-specific type/name), authority or descriptor phrase, conservation code, CALM code (priority flora code for taxa occurring in Western Australia), states in which the taxa occurs, region and extent of reservation, and reserve name and type. Maps are included of the regions used in recording distribution of taxa in each state. Changes to the content and format of the lists are described in detail and this is particularly useful to those familiar with previous editions.

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