

BOOK REVIEW

People, Sheep and Nature Conservation: The Tasmanian Experience

Jamie Kirkpatrick and Kerry Bridle (eds), 2007
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THIS book focuses on the interaction among people, sheep, and the environment in the run country of Tasmania (runs are areas of largely native vegetation where sheep graze or shelter). The major question addressed is: "Can nature conservation be integrated with wool production?" This book deals with the pressing issues of conservation on privately owned or leased land. One of the purposes of the book was stated in the Preface as a "search for potentially effective pathways to maintain conservation values in a production context..." To approach this problem, the authors employed research in the "classic hypothesis-testing mode, in descriptive scientific mode, in the mode of normative social science, and in qualitative mode." The details of methodology and statistical treatment have been relegated to end notes to make the text more readable. To help deal with the jargon of the sheep industry, a Glossary is provided.

The book is divided into eight chapters, in all of which Kirkpatrick was either sole or first author. In Chapter 1, Kirkpatrick traces the history of the sheep industry in Tasmania. His writing style is pleasing as well as informative: "Sheep first nibbled the native grasses of Tasmania, at Risdon, in 1803... The growth [of sheep numbers] had been largely unaffected by thylacines, the Black War, poaching and other forms of early colonial larceny." Chapter 2 describes managing the run country for wool production and compares and contrasts different management systems (e.g., rotational grazing and set stocking or burning versus not burning) and emphasizes the wide variety of managerial approaches. Chapter 3 deals with conservation on the run country and the efforts to prevent soil erosion and salination, and problems of the widespread tree dieback. Much of the information in chapters 2 and 3 comes from interviews with the managers of 48 wool-producing properties, where their comments were organized, tallied, and presented in a series of tables. An Appendix presents the frequency of comments, expressed as a percentage, related to grazing management. A second Appendix gives the percentage frequency of comments on native species and communities. Chapter 4 continues the topic of tree dieback and reports on scientific studies of changes in tree cover, and the factors that produce

successful tree planting. Chapter 5 addresses the question: "Which management regimes benefit or reduce which native species [of plants and animals] and communities?" Chapter 6 presents the conservation problems attendant with the conversion of runs to improved pasture, croplands, tree plantations, or water storage, problems that: "pale into insignificance" the effects of different management techniques, presented in earlier chapters. The penultimate chapter: "The Future of the Run Country," suggests that areas of conservation interest, such as wetlands, are still being degraded and that realistic payment for conservation services combined with sympathetic regulation may be a feasible solution. A concluding two-page chapter presents overall conclusions that include lessons drawn from the book such as the virtue of diversity of management approaches and cooperation and the rather optimistic suggestion that there is the potential for people, sheep, and nature to prosper on the runs.

The problem of ensuring conservation on private land in Australia will be one of the major challenges in the twenty-first century, and this book is an attempt to meet this challenge for an important and sensitive area of Tasmania. A major stated purpose of the book (p. ix) was to search for "potentially effective pathways to maintain conservation values in a production context." The book has achieved a good start in that direction, and describes both qualitative and quantitative ways to assess problems and arrive at solutions. The 268 references cited will certainly be useful. However, much of the information base is qualitative, including quotes from individual managers, often making conclusions difficult to tease out. I also had difficulty with the jargon of the wool-producing industry. The Glossary was helpful, but would have been more so if an asterisk or other device indicated that a word appeared in the Glossary. The Glossary helped me with "set stocking," "hogget," and "DSE" (dry sheep equivalents), but did not with "mulesing," "greasy wool," or "fly strike." Most words eventually were defined, but the book was not especially user-friendly in that regard. These minor problems aside, I found the book an interesting and productive approach to some very real conservation problems. It should be of interest to anyone confronting the problems associated with conservation initiatives on private lands.

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