

BOOK REVIEW

Healthy Rangelands: Principles for sustainable systems. Focus on Australia's Burdekin Rangelands by Marnie McCullough and Barbara Musso (Eds), 2004. Queensland Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries, Rockhampton. ISBN 0 9581014 42, 248 pp. Price softcover A\$49.95 (inc. GST).

The aim of this book is to collate past and present research relevant to the Upper Burdekin Rangelands in order to improve our understanding of how they function and assist in achieving sustainable management. Although a tall order, I feel that this book manages to integrate several disciplines to substantially improve our understanding of the complexity involved in managing such systems. I feel the book is aimed at producers and land managers but would also be a useful resource for both students and scientists.

The book starts with an overview of the Upper Burdekin Rangelands, briefly covering the biophysical nature of the landscape as well as the major land uses. Then the real content of the book begins with an interesting and carefully structured approach to presenting the vast amount of information available. As many of us who work in rangelands are aware, scale is always a significant issue and this is well recognised in this publication. The subsequent chapters in the book are ordered so that information is presented from a fine scale (point/patch scale) to a much broader landscape or catchment scale. The other structural initiative is that each chapter contains two parts; the first presents and integrates current knowledge while the second part of each chapter is devoted to presenting key management principles and guidelines. In this section a list of objectives are presented along with a summary of the processes, factors that regulate them and information about how much we know about them. I feel this is a practical approach and also makes the information very easy to find and digest.

Chapter 1 discusses cattle production systems in this region and it is here we see the focus of the book is mainly towards sustainable production systems. Chapter 2 focuses on water and nutrient cycles and Chapter 3 on healthy pastures. Then the scale is extended and Chapter 4 looks at tree-grass interactions and woodland dynamics while Chapter 5 focuses on the issue and dynamics of weeds at an ecosystem level. Chapters 6 and 7 are refreshing with a look at aquatic ecosystems and biodiversity respectively, topics often not associated with pastoral management. Finally Chapter 8 takes the broadest view and addresses the processes of sedimentation and nutrient exports, and, importantly, salinity at the catchment scale. This list of chapter topics illustrates how this publication successfully brings together an extensive array of information for one Queensland catchment.

My only criticism is that I felt I was left hanging. I felt that the book ended abruptly and needed some conclusion or summary. I think a chapter to tie it all together and cement the main themes would have been useful. I was slightly overwhelmed by the number of objectives and management guidelines so some discussion on priorities or actions or "where to from here" would have helped me get closure.

Overall, I felt that this book successfully filled a gap missing for some time in rangelands worldwide. That is to present land managers with a summary of what the "researchers" have found and how this relates to on-the-ground management. It is not often that a publication collates vast research knowledge and interprets it in terms of practical management actions or guidelines. For this the editors should be congratulated.

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