

Initial concerns that *Back from the Brink* would be a duplication of information presented in a similar publication entitled *People and Nature Conservation: perspectives on private land use and endangered species recovery* released in 1995 (Bennett *et al.* 1995), proved unfounded. Despite the inevitable overlapping contributions, that book dealt mainly with threatened wildlife, and as commented by Carolione Gross (1997), showed a slight Victorian bias. *Back from the Brink* complements *People and Nature* in that there is a nice balance between plants, animals and ecological communities, and contributions pertain to a number of different Australian States, and New Zealand. By focusing on the recovery process itself, *Back from the Brink* also complements another recent key publication, *Conserving Biodiversity: threats and solutions*

(Bradstock *et al.* 1995), which concentrated on evaluating threats to biodiversity, rather than attempting to directly refine plans and policies.

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The Origin and Evolution of Pacific Island Biotas, New Guinea to Eastern Polynesia: Patterns and Processes

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A NUMBER of publications have considered the biogeography of various subsets of the Pacific Region, including the earlier works by J. L. Gressitt (*Pacific Basin Biogeography*) and by F. J. Radovsky and others (*Biogeography of the Tropical Pacific*). In addition to these, substantial edited volumes have been produced on the *Biogeography and Ecology of New Guinea* (by J. L. Gressitt), on *Biogeography and Ecology in Australia* (by A. Keast), on the relationship between these two regions in *Bridge and Barrier: The Natural and Cultural History of the Torres Strait* (by D. Walker) and on *Hawaiian Biogeography: Evolution of a Hot Spot Archipelago* (by W. L. Wagner and V. A. Funk). A substantial list of papers, reviews and symposia also pertain to the biogeography of this region.

The idea for the current book arose from two symposia held in Honolulu in 1992. In addition to the speakers, a number of authors were co-opted to produce this edited volume, which largely concentrates on the area not fully covered by the previously mentioned volumes, namely, Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia. New Guinea is also included as it is that major source area of the Pacific biotas, while Hawaii, the Galápagos, Australia, Indonesia and New Zealand are not, being either peripheral to the area of having been adequately considered in other publications. The result is a 28 chapter book containing a mine of information on the biogeography of the Pacific.

The chapters of the book are structured into three sections. The first section contains nine chapters which consider the origins and development of the islands and

their associated biotas. The first three provide the geological framework and review the contribution of island biotas to evolutionary theory. The remaining chapters in this section investigate the processes which regulate the establishment of life on remote islands. Three of the chapters consider areas which are not strictly within the geographic limits of the book (Krakatoa, Galápagos Islands and Norfolk Island) but which nevertheless throw important insight into colonization and evolutionary processes in the region. The next section of the book contains 15 chapters which document the floras and faunas of the various islands. Six of these consider various plant groups, four consider invertebrates and three relate to vertebrates. The remaining two discuss the important issues of the origin of humans and the need for biodiversity conservation in the Pacific. The final section of the book contains two synthesis chapters, one of which considers the invertebrates of these Islands and the other the plants and vertebrates.

Being an edited volume, it does not present itself as a general reader — the chapters are generally self-standing with little integration or cross referencing. There is also a lack of uniformity of style, with some chapter having abstracts and others not. A couple of chapters contain diagrams (maps) which lack legends. It is also disappointing to find that the colour plates for the relevant chapters are appended at the end of the book. Presumably this is a cost saving exercise, but not one which would be expected in such an expensive book.

Apart from these issues, this is a milestone book which contains much of the available information on the biogeography of this region. It is refreshing to find a book which gives as much attention to terrestrial invertebrates as it does to vertebrates. It dovetails in with the other book on the biogeography of nearby regions and should be an essential addition to any biology library.

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