

### BOOK REVIEW

**Management of Endangered Plants.** S.C. Cropper. Published by CSIRO Australia, Melbourne. 1993. 182 pp. ISBN 0 643 05533 9 (Soft cover). Price \$AU49.95

With the best intentions, Simon Cropper set out to write a book that would combine shelves of published research by biologists around the world with his own years of field experience in Victoria. The resulting amalgam would be the kind of book that could lie dog-eared and grubby on the back seat of a four-wheel drive just as naturally as it could grace a coffee table. It's hard to imagine a book that would succeed on both fronts and *Management of Endangered Plants* will not satisfy either market.

This is unfortunate since there are important lessons to be learnt from Cropper's experience in managing endangered plants in Victoria and there are some interesting tales languishing within the book. The major problem seems to be a lack of synthesis. The paragraphs tumble after one another, a series of mini reviews of published work or personal anecdotes. The cases studied are extremely eclectic and I can't see how they provide a framework for managing endangered species in general. Most of the methods and principles are culled from standard texts or declare what in most cases would be the common sense approach.

There are plenty of statements of fact, but these seldom represent the culmination of a well-argued exposition. We are often presented with dubious generalizations, such as 'newspaper articles do little to aid in species conservation'. This is true because one item in a large Melbourne daily gave the precise locality of a rare orchid population which was subsequently severely damaged. The educative value of media coverage (and the ability to withhold precise locality information) is ignored. Other advice is equally dogmatic and often seems to be based on personal experience rather than any serious analysis of the issues. It is perhaps getting too pedantic, but as a reader I don't like to be told that 'the *only* way to protect vegetation from fire is to lower the risk of fire starting' and 'this can *only* be done by reducing the fuel load on adjacent land' (my italics). In many, or even most, case these statements may well be true, but this is not the way to present a topic as complex as the interaction between fire and Australian vegetation. Other advice is too vague, such as '*ex situ* collections should...be returned to the wild before any significant deterioration has occurred' (this is clarified somewhat 5 pages further on).

In addition to 10 case studies there are chapters on rarity and extinction, conservation strategies, finding rare plant populations, monitoring known populations, management techniques and a series of appendices containing sources of information, various contacts and tools for plant management. The bibliography, glossary, gazetteer and index are comprehensive and useful. As a book of interesting anecdotes, it is nicely presented and includes plenty of localities and plants familiar to at least Victorians. However, the illustrations are of variable quality and some design features are irritating (e.g. appendix items such as the frequently used word 'population' highlighted in bold the first time they appear in each section). Having 'icons' to signify crucial passages is effective if not always all that helpful.

Overall I don't think the book is satisfactory. It certainly contains some useful information and it at least makes us aware of the important role of management in maintaining biodiversity. It fails, however, to excite the imagination or to provide a source book for threatened plant management.

TIMOTHY J. ENTWISLE