

Regreening the Bare Hills: Tropical Forest Restoration in the Asia-Pacific Region by David Lamb. World Forests, Volume 8, Springer, 2011. Hardcover, 547 pp., \$239/d153.00. ISBN: 9789048198702

Thirty years ago, the clarion call of conservation organizations was “once destroyed, tropical forests can never be put back” ... deforestation was forever. The idea that it may be possible to actually restore tropical forest ecosystems was seen as the unattainable pipedream of a few eccentric conservationists ... treated with the same disdain as the search of extraterrestrial intelligence. However, decades of research, by a few dedicated scientists has gradually transformed tropical forest restoration from pipedream to reality, so that now it has become both a respectable field of research and an essential weapon in the fight to save global biodiversity and prevent global warming. One of the most venerable pioneers of forest restoration in the tropics is David Lamb from University of Queensland and he has recently made good use of his “retirement” by publishing a book: “Regreening the Bare Hills: Tropical Forest Restoration in the Asia-Pacific Region”, which is set to become the indispensable textbook on tropical forest restoration for many years to come. Although the target region is Asia-Pacific, the concepts and principles presented in this volume are widely applicable to most tropical countries.

Based largely on Lamb’s experience, accumulated over a long and distinguished career in the field, this veritable “magnum opus” covers both the scientific and practical aspects of forest restoration, as well as socio-economic considerations, such as planning and management in great detail. Lamb comprehensively and critically reviews the huge and growing literature on the subject and illustrates his synthesis with dozens of case-study portraits.

The book has four parts. The first three chapters set the scene by defining the problem, describing the complex social and environmental causes of large-scale deforestation and the more insidious forest degradation. The second part reviews the forest restorer’s “toolbox”, weighing up the potential roles played by protection and management of secondary forests, accelerated natural regeneration, tree planting, direct seeding etc. Lamb meticulously weighs up the pros and cons of single- vs. mixed-species plantations, agro-forests, and ecological restoration. Where is it appropriate to restore the original climax forest ecosystem? And where should we aim for more economic forms of forestry? He presents an erudite discussion of species selection (exotic or native) and plantation design and a host of other critical decisions, upon which the success of forest restoration projects depend.

The third part deals with the practical considerations of implementing restoration projects such as funding, especially payments for ecological goods and services (PES). The roles of both governments and local communities are discussed and some simple tools to foster a participatory approach to restoration are provided.

The fourth part deals with forest landscape restoration (FLR); really a synthesis of many of the practical and planning components covered in early parts. FLR is defined as “a planned process, which aims to regain ecological integrity and enhance human well-being in deforested or degraded landscapes”. It provides procedures whereby site-level restoration decisions conform to landscape-level objectives. Lamb discusses the role of FLR in achieving compromises between meeting the needs of both humans and wildlife, by restoring a range of forest functions at the landscape level. Again, here the critical role played by local communities in shaping the landscape is emphasized as well as the benefits they gain from restored forest

resources. Lamb portrays FLR as an inclusive, participatory process, but one which should be based on sound, science-based practices.

The book is exceedingly well structured and written and provides a well-balanced treatment of forest restoration from both the ecological and economic perspectives. It is, at present, the most definitive treatment of tropical forest restoration on the market and as such it should be on the bookshelves of all tropical ecology lecturers and students, as well as NGO's and forestry departments. It should be treated as an invaluable investment by all those involved in protected areas management and REDD+ projects throughout the region and beyond.

My main gripe is with the publisher rather than the author. The knowledge accumulated in this book is of such world-saving potential that it simply cannot be left in the form of an unaffordable tome (US\$ 239!!), written in a language (English) that most of the inhabitants of the target zone (Asia-Pacific) cannot read. I urge Springer to work with the author to produce low-cost editions of the book, translated into Asia-Pacific languages, and in more user-friendly formats, such as electronic books. To leave this important work languishing on the dusty bookshelves of the few institutional libraries that are wealthy enough to afford it, would be a travesty.

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