

for Scientific Information, and the many conferences on electronic publishing – and are experimenting with real time online delivery of information and new pricing models.

Hardly anyone – scientist, engineer or a lay person – ever learns about the Internet and the Web from a book. Most of us learn to point and click our way from site to site through hands on experience and with some help from our colleagues. The Net itself offers much help. But if one wants to acquire mastery over the Net and explore all possibilities on the Web, then one needs the help of an expert. This book by Brian Thomas is one of the best I have come across. The fact that four reputed societies other than SPIE, viz. ASME, IEEE, IEEE and SAE, have lent their names as joint publishers is an indication of the importance they attach to the new developments and the quality of the book.

The book is divided into three parts, each dealing with one of three distinct yet closely overlapping areas, viz. essential tools and applications, web authoring and publishing, and searching and researching. Starting with a comprehensive introduction to web technologies and the essential tools for communication, the author moves on to browsers and tells the readers how to leverage one's browser to maximize one's advantage. Then he moves on to providing some in-depth perspectives on electronic publishing in science and engineering and explains the profound implications of 'personal publishing'. This is followed by some down-to-earth instruction on constructing web pages and advanced web publishing. He introduces HTML and other essential technologies, explains the construction of tables, forms, and graphics, and provides guidance on standards and avoiding pitfalls. The author makes a casual mention of XML, which was emerging at the time of writing. Surely, he will write a lot more about it in subsequent editions.

In the final section, the most useful to a very large number of scientists and engineers, the author discusses, with the help of some actual examples, the merits of half a dozen search engines: AltaVista, HotBot, Infoseek, Excite, Lycos and Yahoo. He lists a very large number of selected web sites for 22 fields, running to more than 150 pages. The fields include agriculture, aeronautics, biology, chemistry, computer science, medicine, physics,

and virtual reality. A glossary that has more than 200 entries, a bibliography of selected books and a whole section comparing different search engines add to the value of the book.

On the whole this is a useful book written by an expert. It will certainly help one get the best out of the Web. It is excellent value for money.

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**Hotspots of Endemic Plants of India, Nepal and Bhutan.** M. P. Nayar. Tropical Botanic Garden and Research Institute, Thiruvananthapuram.

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The signing of the Convention of Biodiversity (CBD) has placed a heavy responsibility on the developing countries in the tropical-subtropical-hot temperate belt of the world. This belt has not been affected by the successive glaciations. It has, therefore, remained relatively undisturbed and is very rich in biodiversity. It also harbours Vavilovian Centres of origin and evolution of crop plants.

Although the signing of the CBD was apparently a political event, most of the developing countries did not realize the full implication of what they had *actually* signed. As the story goes, when USA refused to sign CBD, many developing countries, who had signed CBD earlier, had second thoughts and became suspicious as to what they had actually signed. If true, this reflects on the extent and nature of ignorance at the political and administrative levels about CBD in the developing countries. Such an ignorance still prevails even though a country like India is highly respected for its scientific and technical work in biological and agricultural fields. Hardly any country (India included) followed the CBD with an implementable conservation strategy *actually* on the ground.

With the foregoing in mind, the book entitled *Hotspots of Endemic Plants of India, Nepal and Bhutan* by M. P. Nayar is most timely. We are indeed grateful to him for this study and India should use this well-researched document to con-

serve atleast its endemic flora. If appropriate steps are not taken in time, endangerment of such species may lead to their extinction. India has already a sound knowledge base about the hotspots and the endemic plants, but it has not translated it into action. There is need for the following by the nodal departments/ministries:

- Based on well-thought out criteria, prioritization of the endangered species and areas needs to be attempted. A major programme needs to be mounted on the conservation of the prioritized endangered species so as to save these in time and space. This does not mean only cordoning off areas and hoping that these species will be saved, but it means conservation has to be attempted on genetic-evolutionary basis. If this is not done soon, the country will lose some of its distinctive plant wealth.
- A similar exercise needs to be attempted on our endangered animals. Here no doubt some work has been done in the past on mega-animals but it has not followed genetic-evolutionary pathway.
- ZSI in association with Bureaus of Fish and Animal Genetic Resources of the ICAR, needs to put up a well-researched document like that of Nayar on animals.
- A group needs to be identified for microorganism conservation. We have neither any worthwhile knowledge about this wealth nor about its actual loss. This being so notwithstanding the fact that the ICAR has decided to constitute a National Microbial Gene Bank.
- As a follow-up of the good work done by Nayar, the government may seriously consider creating a mechanism to oversee the implementation of the trans-ministerial conservation project on endangered biota of India.

If adequate attention is not paid to these aspects, the country will lose its floristic and faunistic distinctiveness. Being a biomass-dependent country, the biotic wealth is one of its main strengths. The fund of knowledge generated over the years now needs to be used to generate biowealth.

It may also be remembered that at one time the rice cultivation in the entire SE Asian belt was threatened on account of

a very vicious viral disease. The saviour was one resistant gene for this virus found in a wild rice (*Oryza nivara*) collected from a godforsaken place like Gonda in Uttar Pradesh. This single gene made a colossal contribution to the well-being of whole of the SE Asia. It shows the importance of our wild flora. We do not know what the country will need in future. Therefore, we should try to conserve as much biodiversity as is possible.

We are grateful to Nayar for producing this book which contains a wealth of information useful to phytogeographers, ethnobiologists, biologists, evolutionists, geneticists and breeders.

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**Biomass Studies: Field Methods for Monitoring Biomass.** Shailaja Ravidranath and Sudha Premnath. Oxford and IBH Publishing Co Pvt Ltd., 66 Janpath, New Delhi 110 001. 615 pp.

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Measurement and documentation are the essence of a growing scientific field and I was hoping this book would guide the large number of lay environmentalists into a new scientific data collection enterprise. Such a mass data collection movement could bring in more scientific temper than the conventional jathas and morchas.

The book may not do this but could be the first small step towards this goal. This book is an outcome of a project for studying environment, that involved college students. The book is well suited to do, but I have my doubts whether it will help NGOs (non-government organizations) or government organizations to undertake such studies. What comes out after going through the book, but is not stated explicitly, is that such a monitoring study is a major expenditure in time and effort and therefore expensive. How can an NGO or a GO justify this? Only understanding the status or creating awareness does not justify the expenditure, if there is no action goal in mind.

The book does not attempt to quantify the effort say in man-hours.

The chapter on Applications of Biomass studies should have come first, so that the reader knows how he can use it. More important, this should have applications that help to save or generate wealth, in whatever form. Unfortunately all such possible applications have been put in just 35 words.

Some elaboration of how this kind of study leads to income generation or saving would have been invaluable in promoting the use of this technique by NGOs. Though not suitable for use by most NGOs in its present form, the book is an excellent resource for educational institutions to give small projects for students to do. Over a period considerable data about the neighbourhood can be collected. Also the students will (i) learn about problems and opportunities through interacting with the community, (ii) get familiar with the use and meaning of statistical techniques and (iii) be able to write reports for different target groups.

The authors have very comprehensively dealt with all aspects of monitoring and measuring from technique; applications, recording of data, interpretation and writing reports for scientific documentation, for planners and decision makers, local community leaders—I wish they had also included funding agencies.

The value of the book would have been increased considerably, if the authors had included case studies at least one for each chapter from the field studies already conducted. This omission has made the technique look less significant than it actually is. Also, the illustrations do not supplement the text in explaining the methods.

There are also a few errors ('Identifying and using plants for their medicinal value dates back 100,000 years or more'; obviously lack of understanding of the time scale of human development). The belief that medicinal plants, locally used take 80% of the health care is also questionable—certainly not true of western Maharashtra.

The moisture content, even approximation seems to have been ignored in the collection of data, as also some units of measurement used locally. For example, dried fodder is sold in bundles not by weight (also some leafy vegetables). If ignored these can produce variations of 200–300% in value or quantity.

Some of the compromises suggested by the authors also give the impression that they have stressed more on the academic part at the cost of the implementable needs. For example, making 60 plots of  $0.5 \times 0.5$  m will not give as good data as compared to one plot of  $5 \times 3$  m. There is not much attention given to the type of soil, which can vary from plot to plot levelling and gradient, weeds, method of irrigation, etc. These produce variations that can make the monitoring exercises less meaningful.

If the authors had gone through the exercise of doing these tests in the field by themselves and found logical applications, that data would prove helpful to the readers and the country at large.

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**Human Nutrition in the Developing World.** Michael C. Latham. FAO Food and Nutrition Series, #29. 1997. 508 pp. Price not known.

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While there are many books devoted to nutrition, very few of them give an overall perspective on all aspects in a concise and comprehensive manner. This publication by FAO is one in that direction. A ready reference on nutrition and nutritional disorders in general for the developing world. The book emphasizes the food-based approach as the only solution to nutritional problems of the developing countries. The book comprises of 5 parts dealing with causes of malnutrition, basic nutrition, disorders, foods and nutrition policies and programmes.

The first chapter commences with the noble objectives of the 1992 International conference on nutrition. The extent of the problem and the broad etiology and contributing factors of malnutrition are explained. The following chapter elucidates food production and highlights the importance of household food security to combat malnutrition.

Chapter 3 is on nutrition and infection, health and disease. Some important examples of interventional studies are also illustrated.

Chapter 4 is on social and cultural factors while the fifth chapter deals with