

## BOOK REVIEWS

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neotropical biodiversity. Despite criticisms, Haffer's theory still remains popular, meriting a fairly comprehensive treatment in this book.

John Kricher also discusses the 'great American interchange' – a phenomenon that took place 2.5–3.0 m.y. ago, when North and South Americas were united by the Panamanian isthmus, creating a land bridge between the two vast continents. The land bridge enabled the interchange of biodiversity between the two continents to the extent that 50% of all neotropical mammalian families and genera are North American in origin. In fact, it was this land bridge that the ancestors of the Amerindians traversed some 20,000–40,000 years ago.

As titled appropriately, the book is indeed a 'Neotropical Companion' devoting most of its chapters to discussing the various components of the region's biodiversity, from rainforests to coral reefs, providing clues to identification with a series of well-executed drawings and photographs. It even talks about the neotropical people, their beliefs, touching

on issues such as the relevance of cocaine to their spiritual and cultural lives, providing a glimpse of the conflicts in its eradication. These conflicts are real and often highly politicized, as I have witnessed in Colombia.

Interesting highlights of the accounts of early European travellers in the neotropics find place throughout the book. The most interesting of these accounts is on how the river Amazon got its name. Leaving all these to the imagination of the readers, I wish to add a few remarks on the overall contents of the book. The book is indeed excellent. However, it could have undergone a little more careful spell-check. There are by normal standards, too many of wrongly spelt words and erroneous numbers. I am more concerned by the latter since it can mislead the readers. For example, '... approximately 0.2 person/square km (0.12/sq. mile), ... 1.5 cm (5 ft) long giant armadillo, ... this 2.5 cm (1 m) long black ant and ... forest originally occupied about 3.96 square km (1.5 million sq. miles)' in pages 175, 236, 328 and

337, respectively. There are many more, unfortunately though! Further, in the first few chapters while discussing the magnitude of species diversity in the neotropics, the importance of area on the number of species of plants has not been brought out (p. 35), while care has been taken to provide this information for birds. Comparing vascular plant diversity in the Barro Colorado Island (Panama) with that of La Selva (Costa Rica) does not make much sense when area and topography are not comparable. The former is a recently created island in the Panama Canal.

Despite these shortcomings, the book is one of the best summaries of neotropical biodiversity. It should appeal not only to serious students, but also to lay readers both in the Americas and the world over.

R. J. RANJIT DANIELS

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## MEETINGS/SYMPOSIA/SEMINARS

### Satellite Workshop on Cryogenics for Large Systems (CRYOWORK)

Date: 28–29 February 2000  
Place: Gandhinagar, India

Contact: Prof. Y. C. Saxena  
Chairman, Local Organizing Committee  
Institute for Plasma Research  
Bhat, Gandhinagar 382 428, India  
Phone: 79-286 4690/9858/9850  
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E-mail: saxena@plasma.ernet.in  
URL: <http://www.plasma.ernet.in/workshop/cryowork>

### VI CME in Haematology and Haemato-Oncology

Date: 11–14 May 2000  
Place: Mumbai, India

VI Continuing Medical Education in Haematology and Haemato-Oncology would be oriented towards PG students and senior staff members from pathology, paediatrics and medicine. It would cover both basic and clinical haematology (diagnostic and therapeutic aspects).

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