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Review: Planning for Biodiversity: Issues and Examples

By Sheila Peck

Reviewed by [Elery Hamilton-Smith](#)
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Peck, Sheila. *Planning for Biodiversity: Issues and Examples*. Washington, DC: Island Press, 1998. 221 pp. ISBN 1-55963-401-4 (paper). US\$27.50

This is an eminently readable book on a very important topic. It outlines a number of basic principles in providing for biodiversity within the context of urban and regional planning. The various case studies bring the subject to life, and in themselves give a positive vision to the maintenance of eco-systems. It focuses on the local-scale level of action that commonly falls within the province of the planning profession and this is both a valuable and practical focus. But on the broader scale, it is disappointing in that it devotes little attention to the role of protected areas, although its focus on off-reserve conservation is indeed welcome. Regrettably, particularly for U.S. readers, it draws entirely upon experience in the United States. There is virtually no reference at all to broad-scale national or even state frameworks equivalent to the landcare and similar movements now found in many countries.

It deals with seven topics: the conceptual nature of biodiversity, developing priorities in conservation, understanding change and disturbance, spatial issues, design of reserves, collecting baseline data, and monitoring for adaptive management.

Unfortunately, there are some serious omissions. While dealing with how planning and management techniques might be used to maintain biodiversity, there is no baseline discussion on why biodiversity is important—the very spring of criteria for selecting between various options for action. Perhaps as a consequence, the only criteria for establishing conservation priority are those concerned with the scale of the conservation project—very important to planning, but only one part of a complex picture. The rising interest in risk assessment and risk management strategies is not addressed, nor is the ubiquitous problem of conflicting stakeholder objectives.

Similarly, the discussion of the impacts of change and disturbance and the review of methods for resource inventory and monitoring are both relatively superficial and only briefly describe biological assessment. There is no assessment of the buzzword of "sustainability" and the application of that concept. Finally, it is disappointing to find little on the principles of

environmental restoration, a priority task in many modern countries.

Planning for Biodiversity: Issues and Examples can be assessed as a useful text for beginning students in urban and regional planning or for planning practitioners in mid-scale planning. It introduces them to a number of basic concepts, and provides a framework for thinking about their own practice. But it will be of limited value to those engaged in professional eco-system management.

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