

## Book review

### Forestry in a Global Context

R. Sands

CABI Publishing, 272 pages including 17 pages of indexes  
ISBN 978 0 85199 089 7, ISBN 0 85199 089 4\*, Softcover £25.00\*\*

The readers of *Australian Forestry* are probably already aware of the historical roles that forests played in the development of civilisation, as well as the roles that they currently play in many environmental, economic and social issues. However, wouldn't a simple textbook that outlined these roles and looked at forestry from an historical and international context, and in which the complex interaction between people and forests was explored, be an extremely useful addition to the library of anyone who needed to deal with those who aren't regular *Australian Forestry* readers? Well, that is obviously what Professor Roger Sands thought when he authored this textbook. The resulting work is a useful source of general information, facts and figures to support interaction with non-foresters, and will serve as a textbook for general courses given to a wide range of students on themes such as forest and society.

The first chapter of this eight-chapter book starts with an overview of the impact of forests on the rest of the earth's systems before humans appeared, and then moves on to the interplay of humans (and their development of agriculture and 'civilisation') on forests and of forests on humans. Subsequent chapters focus on the types and distribution of forests around the world; environmental values; forest products; deforestation and degradation in the tropics; sustainable management; plantations and social forestry. Each chapter is introduced by an interesting context-setting piece, and concludes with an extensive list of references and suggested further reading. The text is well grounded with examples and case studies, and presents a wealth of information mined from FAO and published or grey literature summarised as tables and figures. There are actually so many potentially useful tables — ranging from net primary productivity by vegetation type through to areas existing, lost and planted; estimated species loss due to deforestation; economic impact of pests; net present worth of alternative agroforestry regimes; and product characteristics — that the lack of a list of tables (and figures) is a slight drawback to maximising their usefulness. There are, however, useful indexes of significant trees, plants and places mentioned in the book, as well as a general index.

Roger acknowledges that lecture notes for an introductory university course provided an initial basis for this textbook, and that origin is evident in the absence of an expectation that readers will have any pre-existing knowledge of forest biology, history

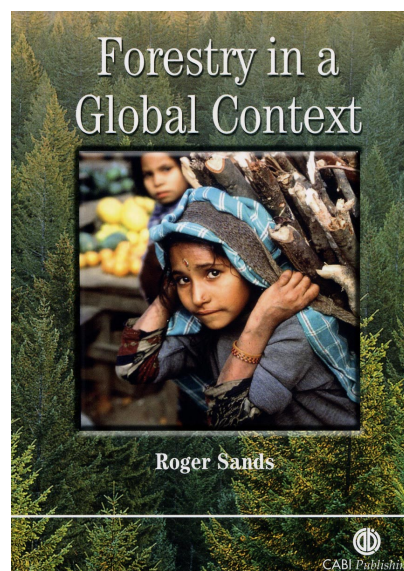
or jargon. Unfortunately a small number of the figures also appear to have been reproduced from those lecture notes, with magnified bit-maps and text being a little unprofessional looking or unclear. This is definitely a 'text' book with a lot of written information presented on each page and, apart from the front cover, no photographs. I understand that the inclusion of colour plates in such a book would raise the cost of publication, possibly higher than the psychological limit beyond which students do not consider purchase, but it does strike me as a lost opportunity that the sub-chapters on aesthetics, ornamentals and different forest types, or even different silviculture and disturbance regimes, are not illustrated with representative photographs.

Roger has tried his 'best to be objective' but warns the reader upfront that some preconceptions from his 40 years of exposure to research and academic environments in traditional forestry are inevitable. Overall, I think he has managed a laudable objectivity with only a few minor lapses, e.g. sub-headings under 'Forest Plantations' include 'Arguments in Favour of Plantations' and 'Arguments Used Against Plantations' suggesting, to me at any rate, that he believes the 'against' arguments are 'used' but the favourable arguments are real.

This text is a useful addition to the field and well worth considering despite the minor flaws mentioned.

**Cris Brack**

*The Australian National University, Canberra*  
Email: Cris.Brack@anu.edu.au



\* ISBNs are changing from a 10-digit to a 13-digit format; both have been issued in this transition period.

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