

Book Review

"Rainforest: Dispatches from Earth's most vital Frontiers"

The eponymously named Tony Juniper wrote this rather handsome volume, published in 2018. Juniper, CBE, is described as Britain's best-known environmental campaigner. He has written a number of books on 'natural history' subjects. He has worked with Birdlife International and Friends of the Earth in the campaign to preserve the world's tropical forests, for more than 25 years, and also as an advisor to the Prince's Rainforests Project.

The book contains 447 pages plus two colour sections, each of 8 pages. The text is divided into 5 sections, with a total of 22 chapters, including an extensive endnotes section. The 5 sections are titled respectively; "Earth's Most Vital Systems"; "The Americas", "Africa", "Asia and the Pacific", and "Worth More Alive than Dead".

The very first chapter sets the tone for the book, with the title *"Rainforest - a clue in the name: How tropical rainforests make clouds and recycle water, sustaining farming far away from where they stand"*. This chapter describes how early naturalists, such as Humboldt and Schimper, began to realise how rainforests help to distribute fresh water (falling as rain) throughout the globe. There was much early debate also as to the definition of a rainforest, with relatively general agreement that 200 cm or more of rain, per year, was the basis for a rainforest. The Amazon rainforest (currently being burned at a horrifying rate, to the indifference of Brazil's current President) is believed to move about one-fifth of the world's riverine fresh water, and it discharges some 15 billion tonnes of fresh water into the Atlantic ocean, each day.

Equally important are the effects of rainforests in sending atmospheric 'rivers' of fresh water for long distances through the atmosphere. This process has been nicknamed the 'biotic pump', and is responsible, for example, for delivering, through so-called 'sky rivers', rainforest water to remote corners of the globe. Removal of these forests threatens fresh water supplies in areas thousands of kilometres away.

The balance of the books delves into the impacts and fates of rainforests in many parts of the world, mostly in the warmer portions of the globe. A recurring theme is that of the damage that the human race is doing to these forests, and to the wildlife that they sustain', as well as the forest peoples that have co-existed with the

forests for millennia. The author makes it quite plain that, if we demolish the rainforests, our world will become a much less pleasant place to live in.

The endnotes section, divided up by chapters, is an invaluable and up-to-date information source with very many references, the majority of them via internet. It would have been nice to see a mention of New Zealand's rainforests, but you can't have everything! If you are interested in plants, animals, hydrology, or indeed the future of humanity, this book is thoroughly recommended.

Nick Miller

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