

BOOK REVIEW

John Terborgh Requiem for Nature Island Press 1999 (ISBN 1-55963-587-8) 234 Pages with index, Hard cover \$24.95.

Review by Mark J. Spalding

This book about the current state, probable future and policy prescription necessary for the preservation of tropical forest resources is as insightful, as it is frightening. John Terborgh, the James B. Duke Professor of Environmental Science and Botany and co-director for the Center for Tropical Conservation at Duke University, drives home the sad state of affairs in protected natural areas in tropical regions, the failures of the many attempts to do something about preserving them, and prescribes some tough medicine for a cure to the inadequacy of our care giving to date.

The descriptive portion of the book recounts Terborgh's observations in parks and other protected areas in Latin America with which he is intimately familiar, as well as of other tropical forests elsewhere in the world that he has visited or studied. He lays out a detailed description of what these places looked like 25 years ago, what they have become today, and why they will not survive the twenty-first century. In doing so, he accomplishes something few can do; he presents an increasingly gloomy picture but infuses it with his love of these places. Because of his years of working in tropical forests, he understands those in developed and developing countries who address these forests from different perspectives. This makes the book interesting and enjoyable

to read because he has a sense of drama and an eloquence that often escapes those in the natural sciences who are such important holders of information that the rest of us need to know. Or, should I say, must know.

Terborgh makes it clear that assumptions underlying protected area designations are often wrong. "[T]he reasons why so many parks falter and fail must be addressed. None of the reasons is pleasant, and openly addressing many of them would be politically incorrect." (Page 22). Just because a park is created does not mean it is actively protected. If he stopped here he would only reach the concept of "paper parks" that so many others have asserted exist worldwide; instead he provides a cogent description of the causes. "[M]any parks are not up to the job assigned to them." (Page xi). Environmental degradation continues apace as a result of a lack of, and lax enforcement of, law - as well as due to cultural perspectives that view undeveloped land as open for grabs, unproductive land as wasted, and that arming park rangers and giving them authority to arrest squatters and natural resource pirates or poachers undermines social policy and military power. "[In] developing countries . . . appreciation of wild nature is minimal and public institutions are notoriously frail." (Page 12). "Worse, wildlands are viewed as a national embarrassment, a mark of underdevelopment and immaturity as a nation." (Page 153). Thus many developing countries offer subsidies for clearing land and for the exploitation of natural resources.

However, degradation also continues because well-intentioned outsiders are not designing, implementing or achieving a coherent plan for saving wild nature. In fact, "conventional wisdom now being applied to the conservation of tropical nature is misguided and doomed to failure."

(Page 7). Plans for regulated "sustainable use" of wild game and other forest products have failed, because open access to the resources leads to overexploitation every time. Developed country funding of tropical forest park management is resented, short lived and often misappropriated due to corruption. Most ecotourism is not really environmentally sound, it only claims to be in order to attract customers. Debt for nature swaps have run out of steam. Programs to stimulate local economic interest in conservation more often result in attracting newcomers to parks and thus increase pressure on resources.

The prescriptive part of this book is less well done, because half the prescription is missing. Good ideas, even bold ideas are presented together with good arguments on why they may be the only hope for saving the world's tropical forests and hence much of biodiversity itself. However, I was left asking myself "how could these ideas be implemented?" If we accept Terborgh's convincing description that the forests will soon be gone, and his convincing demonstration that the efforts at supporting enforcement in-country have failed as have the creation of economic incentives for protection by locals, we need to know what to do. His ideas are close to radical, for example, relocation of those persons living in parks, internationalization of management of parks, or the creation of a Nature Keepers armed force like the UN Peacekeepers to intervene on nature's behalf, so radical that even he acknowledges that they would be hard to implement and may only be achieved through incremental change. But, how do we overcome the resistance to radical ideas? How do we convince governments and their constituents to expend some real effort and some significant money? How do we convince the hosts of the tropical forests to give up sovereignty sufficient for Terborgh's ideas to be applied? Without more complete prescriptions for implementation, we will not achieve the "internationalization of management of

protected areas." Terborgh's only hint at offering a solution for his incomplete prescription is that we need leadership. "All it might take to carry the world over this next great hurdle is one inspired leader who would resist the environmental despoilers and make people understand that in the end, quality of life matters more than the bottom line." (Page 186).

Mark Spalding is a Lecturer at UCSD's Graduate School of International Relations and Pacific Studies where he teaches international environmental policy and law courses and acts as faculty advisor and Executive Editor for the *Journal of Environment & Development*. However, most of his time is devoted to working with non-profit environmental groups to provide research support and advice on international environmental policy and law issues - primarily related to conservation, protected areas and ecotourism. He may be contacted at mspalding@ucsd.edu