

Book Review

Sodhi, N.S., G. Acciaioli, M. Erb and A. Khee-Jin Tan (eds.) 2008. *Biodiversity and Human Livelihoods in Protected Areas: Case studies from the Malay Archipelago*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

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Once upon a time managing protected areas was viewed as a simple concept: draw a boundary, send the rangers out, and invite the tourists in. The realities, however, of decades of experience with the state-centric “fortress park” model has been less pleasant than the imagined idyll, especially for inhabitants of protected areas in developing nations- and hasn’t been as effective as hoped in conserving biodiversity. Recent protected area literature reveals a stark divide between promoters of nature and people in protected areas (Hanna et al. 2008).

This book is provocative. By directly tackling the uncomfortable questions about protecting places along with – or more often at the expense of – their human inhabitants, Sodhi and his colleagues explore the most difficult problems of contemporary conservation in protected areas; moreover, they do so from a truly interdisciplinary perspective. This is no small task, as chapter authors at times express radically different opinions about conservation solutions, yet the editors successfully integrate these diverse contributions into a coherent and rational whole. Their work joins the literature at an opportune time, when the academic discord about the relative priorities of people and nature in those areas – though still strong – shows signs of waning. This volume is a timely response to Redford et al.’s (2006) call for a more resilient dialogue on society’s expectations for protected areas, and does much to move that dialogue beyond simplistic, polarized narratives. This book has a clear regional focus, yet its message is relevant for protected areas worldwide.

The volume is rich, comprehensive, and well-organized. The book is organized into three sections, each with introductions and conclusions- useful for readers navigating the major themes without getting lost among the contributions of 49 authors. Further, each chapter has a clear summary of its key points.

The first section (conservation needs and priorities) takes a conservation biology perspective on the ecological significance of and threats to the biodiversity of the Malay Archipelago; a region containing two of the world's 34 biodiversity hotspots. Chapters present data illustrating the importance of protected areas as conservation tools, even in urban environments, and provide some assessment of their effectiveness.

The second section (conservation with and against people(s)) is the longest, containing detailed ethnographic examinations of the relationships between people and protected areas. The opening chapter adopts a unique format; a thought-provoking dialogue between two experienced conservation scholars (Suraya Afiff and Celia Lowe) about the multiple meanings and manifestations of collaboration and participation. The following chapters consider a range of protected area situations, terrestrial and marine, in considerable detail. Taken together, these cases illustrate a broad range of outcomes of efforts to reconcile the competing aims of biodiversity conservation and human dignity; even paradoxical ones where “top-down” conservation (through strict government control) does seem to be working to the satisfaction of participants.

Third, legal and governance frameworks for conservation are examined; a topic often taken for granted rather than critically examined. Such attention is crucial since systemic problems of legal certainty and multi-scalar governance emerge as underlying drivers creating the observed patterns of conflict and conservation failure in the Malay Archipelago. The differing political legacies and institutions in Indonesia and Malaysia provide an illuminating natural comparison here, illustrating just how counter-intuitive conservation outcomes can be if one approaches the task of protecting biodiversity simplistically, whether from a “top-down” or a “bottom-up” (community-based) standpoint.

Chapters repeatedly emphasize the diversity and complexity not only of the region's biota, but also the variations of state/NGO/ community relationships in protected areas, the complexity within each of those parties, and the political context of decolonization, modernization, and regime changes. The implicit lesson is that attention to social and political context matters profoundly to the conservation effectiveness of protected areas. With the exception of the concluding chapter (which one wishes might have been longer), readers of this journal will find little discussion of common property theory – and even occasional invocation of the classic “tragedy of the commons”. Nonetheless, the chapters contain much relevant consideration of the challenges of commons management.

In summary, this volume accurately portrays the complexity, contextuality, and sometimes harsh realities of contemporary protected area management. By presenting the problem of conservation through a range of disciplinary lenses, the editors not only show the range of challenges with clarity, but also subtly emphasize the value of integrating a diversity of approaches to seek solutions.

Literature cited

- Hanna, K., D. Clark, and D. S. Slocombe. 2007. Introduction: Protected areas in a changing world. In *Transforming Parks and Protected Areas: Policy and Management for a Changing World*, eds. K. Hanna, et al. London: Routledge, pp. 1–11.
- Redford, K. H., J. G. Robinson, and W. M. Adams. 2006. Parks as shibboleths. *Conservation Biology* 20(1):1–2.