The Geography of Life

By Wilfred T. Neill. Columbia University Press, New York and London. 480 pp. 1969. $12.95 (US).

The purpose of this book is "chiefly to portray the broad outlines of animal and plant distribution in all parts of the world, to review the geography of life on land, in fresh water and in the ocean". Since the scope of biogeography is vast and no one book can contain all of the aspects related to the subject, the level at which the author has aimed his book is important. For most professional biogeographers the book would seem to be written at a rather introductory level. People that have a general familiarity with plants and animals and know at least the generic names of commoner plants and animals will find the book extremely interesting. The author writes well and there are numerous illustrations of excellent quality. For one interested in numerous factual remarks concerning odd distributions, the origin of many of our economic plants, the problems of introductions, and many other miscellaneous items relating to the distribution of animals and plants, the book will be a mine of information. However, as with any book of this type, the question of which type of information to include and which to omit is obviously a problem. There are chapters dealing with animal distribution, and others considering plant distributions. However, in some of the chapters on plant distributions the author digresses and includes animals associated with the particular area. This at times lends a somewhat confused aspect to the subject matter as presented. This is not a serious fault as one's primary purpose for reading the book would be to obtain the overall picture of plant and animal distributions. In addition to discussions of terrestrial distributions are chapters concerning continental drift and animals with marine distributions. I found most of the information contained in the book reasonably accurate and it is recommended for anyone interested in general natural history.

My recommendation for the book does not extend to the more advanced level of the serious student of biogeography because of one serious fault. There are numerous statements that are of interest but there are no references to the authors of the statements. This means that there is no way of checking on factual information. At the end of the book there is an extensive bibliography which is not referred to in the text. The bibliography contains a large assortment of papers, some old, some fairly recent, some good, others questionable. If the reader had been given an indication of the coverage of each paper or the usefulness of a particular work, it would have been of considerable assistance. The illustrations, which are of excellent quality and of general interest, are unfortunately not referred to in the text, and are salted around, seemingly regardless of the pertinence to the text.

In summary, 'The Geography of Life' can be recommended for the general reader who wants to have some idea of plant and animal distributions in the world, but for the more serious student the book has various shortcomings including rather vague answers to questions posed on the fly leaf. To be fair, I cannot say that I have seen any other book dealing with the general topic that does a noticeably better job with the subject material. My main objection is that the references to various statements are omitted and this I consider a truly serious fault.

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Seashells of North America: A Guide to Field Identification

By R. Tucker Abbott. Golden Press, New York. 280 pp., 112 col. plates, 2 maps, numerous text figs., 4½ × 7½ inches, 1969 (dated 1968). Plastic-coated paperback. $3.95; clothbound $6.95 (US).

This is the third of the excellent Golden Field Guides. Like all of Dr. Abbott's books it is extremely well-written, informative, and comprehensive. The illustrations by George F. Sandstrom are in natural colour and are so realistic that identification of most of the species should be quick and uncomplicated.

The introductory section is unusually inclusive. Twenty-seven general subjects are discussed. Some of these are: What is a Mollusk?, Evolutionary History, Reproduction, Development, Growth, Sexuality, Feeding, Locomotion, Nervous System and Sense Organs, Marine Communities, Marine Faunal Provinces, Guide to Collecting Areas, Collecting Mollusks, and The Shell Collection. The following 220 pages contain coloured figures and