

BOOK REVIEW

ANTHONY HUXLEY. 2005. **Green Inheritance: The WWF Book of Plants.** (ISBN 0-520-24359-5, pbk.). The University of California Press, Berkeley, CA 94704, U.S.A. (**Orders:** California Princeton Fulfillment Services, 1445 Lower Ferry Road, Ewing, NJ 08618, U.S.A. Tel: 609-883-1759; Fax 609-883-7413; www.ucpress.edu). \$29.95, 192 pp., 234 color, 9" × 10 1/2".

Why is environmental conservation important? If you have ever asked this question, this book will provide your answer. Focusing on the "green mantle" of plant life that surrounds us, the author shows the reader how conservation of the environment is integral to human survival. Color photographs and illustrations, including botanical illustrations from the collection at Kew Gardens, complement the clear writing style of the late Mr. Huxley, a prolific writer and an editor at *Amateur Gardening*. In this book, Mr. Huxley reminds us that "Without plants, animal life could not exist." From the very beginning, plants have acted as the "life support systems" of the planet, providing human and animal life with protection, nourishment, and even the air we breathe. It was the emergence of green plants that changed the poisonous primeval atmosphere into today's breathable oxygen-bearing atmosphere. In Chapter 2, "Guardians of the Environment", the role of plants in protecting the air we breathe, preventing soil erosion, protecting us from harmful radiation, fixing nitrogen in the soil, stabilizing the climate, and producing rain is discussed. The role of cultivated plants in providing us with food and spices is celebrated, as well as the problems resulting from modern agricultural techniques. The 5,000-year history of "green medicine" is detailed from traditional herbal cures to modern drug discovery efforts and the resurgence of herbal medicine. An important section on the conservation of medicinal plants is also included. In a chapter titled "Plants and Society" the importance of plants in our everyday lives and in the lives of other cultures is discussed. Mr. Huxley devotes an entire chapter to the roles of *in situ* conservation, such as land reserves, and *ex situ* conservation, such as modern bio-engineering and gene banks, in protecting our resources and feeding a hungry planet. The author reminds us throughout the book that "We are squandering this inheritance in ignorance, in thoughtless impatience and greed, failing to appreciate the value of what we destroy." The last chapter is appropriately titled "Saving the Plants that Save Us" and summarizes the environmental problems that are depleting plant life on our planet, as well as solutions. The primary approaches to saving our "green inheritance" include halting environmental degradation, rehabilitating land, and conserving the pristine natural and semi-natural vegetation that still remain. Mr. Huxley does not sugar-coat the issue, he acknowledges the difficulty of getting nations to work together, as well as the role that economic disparity plays in the battle. But, he paints a beautiful picture of the reward, "Besides thus providing for our physical needs, plants can also provide solace for the mind. They are endlessly fascinating, exciting, wonderful- even fabulous is not too strong a word, and they are diversely beautiful too."—*Marissa Oppel, MS, Collections and Research Assistant, Botanical Research Institute of Texas, Fort Worth, TX, 76102-4060, U.S.A.*



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