

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Ecology of Fear* by Mike Davis. 1998. Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster. Metropolitan Books. Henry Holt and Company, New York, New York. 484 pages. Cloth (ISBN: 0-8050-5106-6). \$27.50

Mike Davis, author of *City of Quartz*, has produced another southern California classic which is of interest to a broad clientele, including botanists. Like *Cadillac Desert*, this book will be widely used in university classes, and will rapidly become a standard reference in the study of nature and human populations in California. The book is a handsome cloth bound product with numerous illustrations. It is divided into seven topical sections, each with many chapters, an extremely well done annotated footnote segment, acknowledgements, and an index. Although the focus of the book is Los Angeles, the discussion and treatment ranges broadly throughout the southland. Davis' literary digging unearthed many little known references.

The book elegantly demonstrates that "natural disasters" in Los Angeles are the direct consequence of putting people and structures in floodplains, tornado tracks (L.A. has more than Kansas!), high risk earthquake zones, in the paths of inevitable and recurrent wildfires, and in the path of human problems for which nature is blamed. Davis reviews the history and development of Los Angeles beginning with what was before it, its growth through time, the vision of what it might have been through the (rejected) parkland planning of Frederick Law Olmstead, and the broken urban sprawl it has become. All of this is examined in the context of overt greed and nearly blind planning, which followed the dollar of special interests willy-nilly into a patchwork of self created "natural" crises — ridgeline construction in chaparral covered hills requiring subsidized protection from inevitable wildfire, poor construction leading to fire traps in the least wealthy portions of the city, development in the path of debris flows, and so forth. His review of historic bumblng as city planners stumbled into the future makes the city look like a disaster oriented computer game, in which catastrophes arise continuously, and require public subsidy to repair between "attacks."

The book is organized into seven sections, several of which are of particular interest to southern California botanists. "How Eden lost its Garden" describes the rejection of good recommendations by Frederick Law Olmstead and Harlan Bartholomew in 1930 to develop a park and wetland system in the city; the paving and destruction of the Los Angeles River in the 1940s; and another missed opportunity in a study by EDAW of the potential preservation of parkland and biological corridors surviving in 1965. These "lost futures" are engagingly discussed by Davis. "The Case for Letting Malibu Burn" describes the relationship between over-development and fire ecology. In "Maneaters of the Sierra Madre" mountain lion attacks and lion ecology are well discussed, and Davis cites an interview with Paul Beier, as well as many of Beier's publications. Davis chronicles habitat conditions from many obscure references, such as his discussion of the Cienega de las Ranas, a vast former marshland which covered the Tustin plain: "Travelers skirting the edge of the great swamps that once extended southward from Bolsa Chica Mesa to Newport Mesa....encountered even larger populations of migratory wildfowl belonging to 83 species. 'This section of the country, according to a local historian,'...was one of the greatest natural habitats for wildlife and game birds in the world." Other topics among many include bubonic plague with its diversity of vectors, hantavirus, killer bees, and other exotics. An intriguing review is presented of science fiction, other popular, and pulp publications focused on everything from aliens to earthquakes which raze L.A. ("The Literary Destruction of Los Angeles").

Davis chose not to treat a number of subjects which would have been interesting reading, considering his vast perspective. Omitted are the Natural Community Conservation Plan (NCCP) and Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) processes, which represent the "deal" between developers and state and federal enforcers of the Endangered Species Act(s). Nuclear power plants such as San Onofre are not discussed, and although great and well-documented detail is presented about historic losses of biodiversity, the California gnatcatcher, coastal cactus wren,



Pacific pocket mouse and other sensitive species are not discussed, or they are mentioned only in passing. A short section would have been useful that lays-out the actual magnitude of wetland, coastal sage scrub, southern oak woodland, and native grassland losses, as well as an expanded discussion of the scope of rare, endangered, and threatened plants and animals in these communities. Omitted from an otherwise excellent review of the literature are the works of John McPhee (*Controlling Nature*, and *Assembling California*) on debris flows and other southern California disasters, Spence Olin's book on post industrial Orange County, and John Fante's wonderful novels set in southern California. Nonetheless, this book is a masterpiece, which does a fine job of tackling a mammoth topic. Davis' book is exceptional, and I recommend it highly to all.

The reviewer would like to acknowledge the University of California Natural Reserve System's San Joaquin Marsh Reserve for computer support, and a grant from the Transportation Corridor Agencies to the University of California School of Biological Sciences.

— *Peter A. Bowler, Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, University of California, Irvine, CA 92697-2525 and White Mountain Research Station, 3000 E. Line Street, Bishop, CA 93514*

*A Manual of California Vegetation*, By John Sawyer Jr., and Todd Keeler-Wolf. January 23, 1996. Hardcover \$55.00, ISBN 0-943460-25-5; Softcover \$39.00, ISBN 0-943460-26-3. California Native Plant Society Press. Includes 471 pages, 32 Color Plates, indices of plant names, NDDb/Holland types, vegetation names and codes, CNPS' community sampling protocol and forms, literature cited. Order from CNPS, 1722 J Street, Suite 17, Sacramento, California 95814; (916) 447-2677; fax: (916) 447-2727.

This publication, from the cover photograph by Tommy Dodson (the man with the tripod) to Frank Balthis' photo of a wildflower display in the Temblor Range east of the Carrizo Plains is well put together. The reader is introduced to the origin of this publication, its main players, and then the philosophy upon which it is based. The introduction also includes sections on the importance of this publication today and in the future for vegetation conservation and management, the history of vegetation classification in California, and a straight forward section titled "How to Use this Manual."

The thirty-two color plates give the reader a visual introduction to 143 of the 240 series, 10 of the 20 stands, all 7 of the habitats, and 3 of the 8 vernal pool vegetation types addressed in this publication. The 240 series described are divided into sections; fifty-two series dominated by herbaceous plants, 107 by shrubs, and 81 by trees. Each section has a key to their specific series. The 20 unique stands, 7 habitats, and 8 vernal pool vegetation types do not have keys, however. Information on each of the vegetation types includes:

- *dominant and characteristic companion species*
- *community architecture or physiognomy*
- *distribution limits*
- *endangerment status*
- *other classification synonyms*
- *discussion of previous studies*

This manual serves to shift conservation emphasis from a single species approach to that of collections of species in quantitatively described vegetation types. Many of these rare or endangered plant communities and their associated fragile species can be better protected from extinction using this method of listing. This manual is the first text to provide those tools, and allow the beginning of further quantification of additional vegetation types using CNPS field sampling protocol and forms. In my opinion, you need this publication whether, you want to define new plant associations, or understand the ones you are already familiar with.

— *Alan P. Romsper, Coordinator, California State University Desert Studies Consortium*



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