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Review of *Conservation: Linking, Ecology, Economics, and Culture* by Monique Borgerhoff Mulder and Peter Coppolillo

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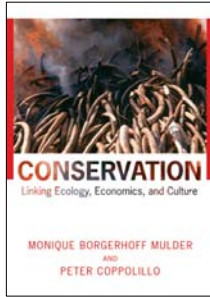
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Reviews

Conservation: Linking, Ecology, Economics, and Culture



Monique Borgerhoff Mulder, Peter Coppolillo
Princeton University Press
ISBN: 0691049793
Year: 2005

Guided by their extensive field experience in conservation research and practice, Monique Borgerhoff Mulder and Peter Coppolillo offer an encompassing introduction to some of the most pervasive and incendiary social and biological science debates concerning biodiversity conservation. As environmental conservation initiatives have expanded throughout the globe in recent decades, scholars primarily from the social sciences have begun to critically examine the often fraught social dynamics of such conservation. This body of work has ignited a series of fierce debates among those with a concern for local peoples who have found themselves marginalized by conservation, those with a concern for rapidly diminishing biodiversity, and those with a concern for both. Until recently much of the expansive literature on the subject is deeply mired in one position or another, highly complicating the task of establishing the broader context and underlying assumptions of the debate. Borgerhoff Mulder and Coppolillo contribute significantly to such a gap by synthesizing a wide array of theoretical and practical resources, spanning social and biological science disciplines as well as policy-oriented and academic publications.

Conservation: Linking Ecology, Economics, and Culture is largely divided into three sections. The first examines the development of conservation thought and practice. Treating conservation as a cultural as well as scientific phenomenon, the authors probe the philosophical and epistemological underpinnings of contemporary conservation. They begin by examining important yet often unasked questions such as “What is biodiversity? Why does it need conserving? What are the goals of biodiversity conservation? Who is involved in the practice of conservation, and what are their objectives?”(1) and provide a historical discussion of how different philosophers, academics, activists and others have come to conceptualize the modern face of conservation.

The second main section of the book focuses on several major intellectual frameworks, which have emerged to examine and critique the social aspects of biodiversity conservation. The authors start by considering contributions from behavioral ecology and anthropology in the analysis of individual actors. They then look at how scholars from disciplines such as economics, political science, sociologists, and anthropologists have approached the study of human institutions and communities. Using insights from political ecology and political science, the authors conclude the section by situating individual actors and communities within larger political and economic spheres.

The third and final section of the book brings together a spectrum of conservation methodologies, from strict protectionism to a panoply of community-based approaches. Without advocating any specific methodology, the authors outline the strengths and weaknesses of the varying approaches with a variety of case studies. They emphasize that no one strategy can provide a “silver-bullet” solution and argue the importance of local context in determining the nature of a specific conservation intervention. The concluding chapter highlights integrative strategies that utilize insights from numerous disciplines. Multidisciplinary training and a holistic perspective, the authors maintain, provide the potential for a bright future conservation.

In sum, Borgerhoff Mulder and Coppolillo's text is an invaluable compendium of historical, scientific, and methodological perspectives on biodiversity conservation. The authors write with a strong grasp of a vast body of literature, effectively integrating countless academic and practitioner conversations and arguments into a seamless volume. Moreover, with their final treatment of on the ground strategies, they do not fall into the common academic pitfall of all-theory-and-no-action analyses. For several decades now, Borgerhoff Mulder and Coppolillo contend, "social and biological scientists have been talking past each other"(xiv). This book represents an important effort in facilitating that crucial inter- and multi-disciplinary communication.

Review by David Himmelfarb, Department of Anthropology at the University of Georgia.