

***Biodiversity: An Introduction* by Kevin J. Gaston and John I. Spicer.  
Blackwell Publishing, 2004. US\$49.95**

Whenever I explore a new book my mind goes through a checklist of questions. Depending on the subject I ask the following: what is the target audience, how extensive and informative is the coverage of the subject matter, how well is it written, how much can I gain from reading the book, is it a useful reference to have in hand and does the book have a support web site. This latter point is becoming more and more popular these days and my inclination is that books, especially ones with mathematical treatments, should have a support web site where known errors are reported because it seems almost inevitable for books not to have typographical mistakes and also where URL's for additional web resources are updated etc. Some of these were the questions I asked whilst reviewing the second edition of "*Biodiversity: An Introduction*" by Kevin J. Gaston and John I. Spicer (2004). Coauthored by one of the most prolific researchers of biodiversity, the book kept the goal of the original edition to serve as an introductory text to the subject, as well as to provide a starting point to a wide array of literature on biological diversity.

In Mongolia, the concept of biodiversity is poorly understood, let alone the study of it. Even the term *biodiversity* is mistranslated into Mongolian (Boldgiv and Batsaikhan 2003). Also, there is no question that colleges worldwide have been restructuring botany and zoology courses to include less classic Linnaean type surveys of taxonomic groups. In Mongolia, the tradition is kept alive. Therefore, it is important to provide that synthetic view of a bigger picture and the book provides a wide coverage and good overview of various aspects of biological diversity: how it arose, where it occurs, why it is important, and what should be done to maintain it.

On the other hand, this is a terse book. The stated purpose, according to the authors, was to "cover as much ground in as few pages as possible" in the original edition and it succeeds by providing an outline to key issues associated with the study of biodiversity. As a result of this approach, coverage of some of the topics appears to be quite shallow. I would have personally preferred a more detailed discussion about diversity measures.

An important part of the book is the list of supplemental reading at the end of each chapter. It is especially useful for novices who were the target audience of the text and who are just starting to learn about biological diversity. Despite the tradeoff between coverage and depth of elaboration of topics, the book delivers many of the critical issues facing scientists, environmentalists and policy makers in this poorly understood subject. The first three chapters provide a useful overview of the elements of biodiversity, historical diversification and some of the challenges to mapping biodiversity at various spatial scales. I would recommend obtaining this book and using it as a supplemental text for ecology courses at Mongolian colleges that explore the concept of diversity to a certain measure.

### References

- Boldgiv, B., and N. Batsaikhan. 2003. English-Mongolian Dictionary of Ecology. Admon Press, Ulaanbaatar.
- Gaston, K. J., and J. I. Spicer. 2004. *Biodiversity: An Introduction*. Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, UK.

Bazartseren Boldgiv