



PERGAMON

Phytochemistry 50 (1998) 349–351

PHYTOCHEMISTRY

Book Reviews

***Rothschild's reserves: time and fragile nature*, Miriam Rothschild and Peter Marren: Harley Books, Great Horkeseley, Colchester, 1998. 242 pp., £15 ISBN 0-866-89-4-83.**

It is commonplace today to bemoan the loss of species diversity in the rainforests, as logging programmes continue in tropical regions of the world. Less publicity has been given to the destruction of natural habitats in temperate countries. However, for scientists interested in the plant kingdom as a continuing source of new bioactive molecules, it may be just as serious. Even temperate floras, although reasonably well explored for their secondary metabolites, could yield exciting new substances of medicinal value. The book under review paints a sad picture of the loss of ecologically valuable natural sites containing rare plant species in this country. A subtitle might be 'Where have all the flowers gone?' as we look at the English countryside at the turn of the present century.

In 1912, Charles Rothschild, the father of the senior author, put forward a plan for nature conservation, which included the recognition of 182 potential reserves. Unfortunately, the plan never developed and it remained for the Nature Conservancy and other

bodies, to put into practice the system of national nature reserves that exist today. What has happened in the meantime is recounted here. And the frightening thing is that more than half of these reserves have been damaged or destroyed in the interim.

This important book on plant and insect habitats provides a history of English conservation, or the lack of it, since 1912. The two authors have examined all the Rothschild sites and describe in some detail, in each case, the present state of appearance and management. Assessments are made, cataloguing the loss of habitat and of particular plant or butterfly species. Most sites are very well known to all of us and it is a harrowing story. In a chapter entitled 'The problem today', the authors discuss what should be done to halt the damage to our precious nature reserves. They suggest that it cannot be left to politicians and that it is up to interested scientists to see that some action is taken before it is too late.

Jeffrey B. Harborne
*School of Plant Sciences,
The University of Reading
Reading
U.K.*

* Tel. 0118 931 8162; Fax: 0118 975 3676.