

SEABIRD ISLANDS: ECOLOGY, INVASION, AND RESTORATION

Mulder, C.P.H., Anderson, W.B., Towns, D.R. & Bellingham, P.J. (Eds.). 2011. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. 492 pp., 38 black and white illustrations. Hardcover: ISBN 978-0-19-973569-3. US\$79.95.

Many of the first island eradications of introduced predators and herbivores were initiated to save critically endangered species, often but not always seabirds. Throughout the last 40 years, the number of eradication attempts steadily grew and became more ambitious, with larger and larger islands successfully tackled. The New Zealanders pioneered most of the early island eradication techniques on islands around their homeland and in the subantarctic. By the 1990s, numerous islands around the globe were having non-natives removed, with a growing trend towards saving populations of seabirds rather than critically endangered seabird species, which in most cases had already been accomplished.

This trend continues today, now with global prioritization of target islands. Eradication attempts are becoming increasingly bolder and often more controversial, let alone exponentially more expensive. Early eradication efforts were sometimes hell-bent on succeeding, with little or no consideration of potentially disastrous ecosystem-level consequences. Lessons are being learned, however, and more caution is being exercised in planning eradication programs.

This book is not about seabirds – it is about the ecology of the islands they inhabit. In the process of discussing relevant ecological systems, the authors reiterate some facts we already know: that introduced predators are bad for seabirds, that seabirds play an important role in island ecosystems, and that public involvement is critical for eradication program success. Much of this could be considered a primer for seabird conservation, but the book contains important information well beyond this. The editors note that the book (three sections with 13 total chapters) is likely the first ever to address the big picture regarding critical interactions of seabirds with other island biota, and vice versa. They note that eradication must ultimately consider consequences for all island species and remind us that ecosystem restoration must be the ultimate goal.

The first section of the book deals with the natural history of seabird islands and details the role that seabirds play in their overall ecology.

The second section compares seabird island ecosystems around the globe, with the intent of determining which characteristics are common to all or, in some cases, common to certain geographically situated island settings, such as temperate, tropical or cold climate areas. The section also contains a chapter discussing indirect effects of introduced predators on seabird islands, an often-overlooked subject.

The third section of the book focuses on the restoration of seabird islands. Many lessons learned are discussed, and, perhaps more importantly, cautionary advice is given regarding the potential pitfalls of future eradication efforts. One of the key points of this section is that careful forethought and wide planning collaboration are essential. Too often, eradication attempts have been rushed or conducted under a cloak of darkness and have ultimately failed. As the stakes for larger and more visible eradication and restorations increase, these important lessons cannot be ignored. Another volume with detailed case studies of failed eradication attempts, or of unforeseen negative consequences of successful eradication, would be an extremely useful sequel.

There are minor editorial inconsistencies in the book, among which are missing captions (Figure 2.1) and inevitable typographic errors associated with using spell-checking utilities rather than conducting careful editorial review. These minor shortcomings do not detract from the value of this book. A less obvious but very useful value of the book is the extensive literature cited for each chapter.

This book should be mandatory reading for students who endeavor to become involved in seabird conservation or conservation research. It is indeed the current starting point for such learning. Above and beyond that, anyone already involved in island restoration on any level needs this book and the information contained therein.

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