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As a student, I was planning to major in biology, environmental sciences or environmental engineering. I have been, over the last 20 years, an explorer of the natural world, and have developed a strong interest in tropical ecology fuelled by a desire to understand the impact we are having on tropical ecosystems and the biodiversity they harbour. The growth in both our numbers and our impact on the environment has led to the depletion and degradation of the world's natural resources. This is not just an environmental issue but one that should concern all people, irrespective of where they live. Ecology, the science that underpins the conservation, management and wise use of natural resources, has become more than a sub-discipline of biology. Its theory and application require an appreciation of biology, chemistry, physics, geology and physical geography. The conservation of tropical ecosystems also has a social dimension and, therefore, effective management of natural resources also draws from the disciplines of economics, political science, psychology, human geography and sociology. This chapter can provide only an introduction to these complex conservation issues.

Tropical ecology is a huge subject, and even limiting it to the tropics leaves far more material to cover than can be covered in a semester or, indeed, in a book to support a course. I am acutely aware that much has been omitted from this book, and selecting what to include has been the biggest challenge in writing this book. I have drawn from my life and work in the tropics, and in New Zealand and Australia. I have tried to provide a reasonably balanced account, including discussions on terrestrial environments, freshwater systems, aquatic environments and the increased human impact on them. Lakes, coral reefs, mangroves, rivers and streams, life in water, all differ markedly from life on land and these differences can be

effectively used to highlight the differences between them. I have tried to provide some examples of how different ecosystems are adapting to climate change, and I wish to thank the following people for reviewing draft chapters: Dr Mark Ashton, University of Oxford; Dr Paul Anderson, University of Hong Kong; Dr Jerry Baillargeon, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC; Dr Mark Bush, Max-Planck-Institute for Environmental Research, Potsdam; Dr Michael Cheek, University of Georgia; Dr Geoff Gurr, International Union for the Conservation of Nature, Gurney's Bay, South Africa; Dr Michael Hickey, University of Western Ontario; Dr Michael Hickey, Australian National University; Dr Lance Hill, University of Papua New Guinea; Dr Geoffrey Hope, University of Western Ontario; Dr Robert Meades, United States Geological Survey, Denver, Colorado; Dr David Mitchell, Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga; Dr Stephen Mulkey, University of Florida, Gainesville, United States; Dr Nicholas Polunin, University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, United Kingdom; Professor Ghillean Prance, Kew Gardens, United Kingdom; Dr Robert Rabin, University of Missouri, St. Louis, United States; Dr Michael Rabinowitz, Hope University, Australia; Dr Mark Reid, University of Queensland, Australia; and Dr William Tait, Fordham University, United States. I am grateful to those remaining, however, are my own. I thank Dr Alan Crowder, Mirig Murphy, Susanna and Alan Cuthill, and Mausie at Cambridge University Press for their support and care in guiding the manuscript through the production process.

I acknowledge the Regis Allen Graduate Trust for providing a grant through the International Center for Tropical Ecology at the University of Missouri-St. Louis to cover the cost of illustrating the manuscript and purchasing illustrations. I also thank my wife, Maed, for her invaluable love and support. This book is dedicated to our children and the next generation. I thank the curators of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, and the Natural History Museum, London, for permission to use their images. I thank the University of Missouri-St. Louis for permission to use the illustrations of the tropical plants in this book. I thank the International Center for Tropical Ecology for permission to use the illustrations of the tropical plants in this book. I thank the International Center for Tropical Ecology for permission to use the illustrations of the tropical plants in this book.

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