Hilbig W.: **The Vegetation of Mongolia.** - SPB Academic Publishing, Amsterdam 1995. 258 pp., 142 figs., 52 tables. US $ 78.50. ISBN 90-5103-106-8.

The systematic editorial policy of SPB makes it one of the distinguished European publishing houses in the field of ecology, and this book may serve as another evidence to support this statement. We have quite a few information about the vegetation of Europe, North America, Japan and other widely explored areas but still, the are many more regions we know comparably little about, if anything at all. The value of any book like this is in that it contributes to filling this gap.

The overview of Mongolian vegetation stems from the results of numerous expeditions carried out by the staff of Martin Luther University in Halle-Wittenberg between 1974 and 1989. The stepping stone for publishing of this book was Werner Hilbig's thesis from 1987, published in German.

The book starts with brief account on the botanical history of the region followed by general chapters. These give brief account on geeography, demography and climate of this large upland country located in the northern part of Central Asia, relatively scarcely populated and with most area located above 1000 m a.s.l. The variation in geography and climate is reflected by several vegetation zones present, i.e. mountain taiga (covering 4 % of the total area), mountain forest steppe (25 %), dry steppe (26 %), semi-desert (27 %), desert (15 %), and alpine belt (3 %).

The vegetation analysis was carried out by the standard methods of Braun-Blanquet school, this classic approach being undoubtedly most convenient for the work like this. In total, the classification of vegetation types was based on 1900 vegetation samples (relevés) and the work covered all types of vegetation including those strongly affected by human land-use. The data were sampled along main expedition routes and also in selected representative regions. Moreover, some data previously published by other authors were also included. Many plant communities, recognized and described during the author's work in Mongolia, have not been known from any other part of the world and are described as new for science.

In the main section, for each community the information is given on species composition (documented by the synoptic table of the species occurrence in the relevés), structure, ecology, and habitat features. The following vegetation types were distinguished: coniferous forests, broad-leaved forests, scrubland, communities of tall forbs, steppe communities, vegetation of rocks and stony sites, semi-desert vegetation, desert vegetation, alpine communities, aquatic and riparian vegetation, marshland, ruderal vegetation and that of arable fields, meadows and pastures, and some other communities with specific ecology. The effects of humans on vegetation is briefly assessed in the following chapter; these include namely grazing in all vegetation zones, and decline of broad-leaved forests both in quantity and quality.

Numerous black and white photographs illustrate major vegetation types providing the reader with better image of the phenomena described. The list of references is comprehensive, the index is present. Misprints are almost absent. Had the Latin names of plants been printed in italics (normally used in SPB books), it would improve the reader's orientation in the text. Sometimes one can feel that the book was translated into and not written in English, *e.g.* 'coniferous' is probably more proper term than 'needle-leaved'.

To conclude, the value of this book is in gathering the poorly accessible information from Russian, East-European and German literature and synthesizing it with a new original information. Being the first comprehensive overview of vegetation in this area, it becomes a reference work to be complemented and elaborated by the followers. As the author himself points out, there are still major gaps in the knowledge of vegetation of Mongolia, and vast nature reservation and national parks are still waiting for detailed inventories of flora and vegetation to be carried out. Much needs to be done but a solid background is already available in this book.

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