

Preface

This book is a multi-authored account of the many-sided topic of vegetation ecology. It is usual nowadays to involve many authors in a textbook since it is almost impossible for one, or a few, authors to cover the full breadth of a modern field of science. As editor I have certainly had some influence on the choice and contents of the various chapters, but nevertheless the chapters are independent essays on important aspects of vegetation ecology.

During the development of the first, introductory chapter the idea grew not only to introduce some concepts, but also to present some more personal views in a historical perspective on developments in various parts of the world. In this connection I have taken the chance to comment on the use (and abuse) of terms borrowed from other sciences and from society which are less appropriate for vegetation ecology or even ecology at large. I have also paid some attention to topics either not, or only partly, covered by the following chapters and discuss various important new publications which could not all be elaborated in the individual chapters.

Vegetation ecology is linked to a series of other bio- and geoscience disciplines such as animal ecology, climatology, nature conservation, palaeo-ecology, plant geography, plant physiology and population ecology. Some of these transitional fields are, at least partly, treated in separate chapters; others could only be mentioned in passing. In retrospect, two actual topics which were not treated in full in any of the chapters, 'pattern and process in the plant community' and 'plant functional types' deserve special attention, and are treated in sections 1.15 and 1.16 of the introductory chapter, respectively. In order to keep the book to its contracted length, we have cited original research publications only if they were considered to be crucial and were not covered in any generally available textbook or review article. However, in some expanding fields, the literature from the 1990s and even from this century is overwhelming and more citations were necessary here.

I have enjoyed the lively cooperation of the chapter authors and hope that their chapters will be appreciated both as essays in their own right and as intrinsic parts of this book. I should like to thank first of all my wife Marijke van der Maarel for her continuous support and the careful copy-editing of all chapters before they were submitted to the publishers. I am also grateful to the following people – listed in chronological order – who have helped in organizational and technical matters on

behalf of Blackwell Publishing: Ian Sherman, Sarah Shannon, William Maddox, Rosie Hayden, Cee Pike and Janey Fisher.

Finally I hope that this book will find its way across the world of vegetation scientists and plant ecologists.

Eddy van der Maarel

We are grateful to all of the authors and publishers who have granted permission for us to reproduce material in this book, and would be pleased to be notified of any omissions.