

Preface

The wealth of the natural sciences
no longer consists in the abundance of facts,
but in the way they are linked together.

ALEXANDER VON HUMBOLDT

There is no dearth of books on ecology. Why write yet another?

Each person is different, and each views the problems in a different way. Each emphasizes different aspects and describes them in a different style. When I was a student I often found certain books more helpful than others, and I still think it is useful to have a variety of presentations from which to choose. This variety also allows the student to appreciate the diversity within the field of ecology.

I have devoted considerable effort to making this book readable. Throughout I have refrained from using specialized terminology – thus also avoiding the problem that many terms are used differently in the various areas of ecology. Straightforward English is quite sufficient to describe complicated situations. Furthermore, precisely defined terms are usually associated with detailed quantitative descriptions, whereas we are concerned with a general understanding of the dynamics of ecology. For similar reasons I have tried to rely as little as possible on mathematical discussions. All too often, in recent years, people have overlooked the fact that mathematics – like language – can give only a description, albeit an especially precise one.

Further, I have made a point of presenting not only well-established results, but also current hypotheses that give expression to the dynamic development and orientation of present-day ecology. In so doing I hope to stimulate further work in the field, to arouse the reader's curiosity; hypotheses are the salt and pepper of research.

And finally, I have stressed the functional relationships within the complex that is ecology. Every phenomenon has its causes and its effects – a dualism that frequently goes unnoticed.

The first German edition was soon sold out. In preparing the second, I am aiming at a simultaneous English edition to make the book available to readers outside Germany.

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HERMANN REMMERT