

Preface

The biome is a way to bring order to the incredible variation inherent in life on the Earth. Both similarities and differences exist in the assemblages of organisms found in different parts of the world, an observation noted by any traveler and first systematized in the eighteenth century. It is evident, at least on land, that the greatest similarity occurs in regions with the same climate. Although the actual species present are usually not the same, the structure or appearance of the vegetation is. Species adapt to their environment, and a strategy that works in one part of a climate region often works for other species in another part of the region. This basic fact is the foundation of the biome concept.

This book serves not only as an introduction to biomes, but also as the introductory volume in Greenwood Guides to Biomes of the World. With this dual purpose, it emphasizes the concept of the biome and the various environmental factors that control or determine the nature of terrestrial and aquatic biomes at a global scale. For details on one of the world's major biomes, the reader is directed to the volume dedicated to that particular biome. Information is drawn from physical geography, ecology, evolutionary biology, geology, and oceanography to explain the current patterns of life. Change is a constant factor influencing life on the Earth, so considerable attention is given to past, present, and future affects of the ever-changing global environment.

The intended audience of Greenwood Guides to Biomes of the World is the advanced middle school or high school student. The material is also appropriate for undergraduates and anyone else interested in better understanding the