

Preface

I had wanted to write something like this book for many years, but would probably never have dared to attempt it unless I had been asked to by Clive Horwood at Praxis Publishing. As it is, this has been a rewarding experience for me personally, something which has forced me to read literature that I would not otherwise have read, and to clarify things in my head that would have remained muddled.

What I have set out to do here is provide an accessible textbook for university students, and a generalized source of current scientific information and opinion for both academics and the interested lay reader. I have myself often found it frustrating that there have been no accessible textbooks on most of the subjects dealt with here, and I hope that this book will fill the gap.

My friends and colleagues have provided valuable comment, amongst them David Schwartzman, Axel Kleidon, Alex Guenther, Ellen Thomas, Tyler Volk, Ning Zeng, Hans Renssen, Mary Killilea, Charlie Zender, Rich Norby, Christian Koerner and Roger Pielke Sr. I could not stop myself from adding to the manuscript even after they had sent me their careful advice, and any embarrassing errors that have slipped through are of course a result of my doing this. I am also very grateful to everyone who has generously given me permission to use their own photographs as illustrations in this book, and I have named each one in the photo caption. Lastly but very importantly, Mei Ling Lee has provided the encouragement to show that what I have been writing is of interest to somebody, somewhere.

Thanks in particular to Neil Cobb for providing the photo of a mountain scene, used on the cover of this book.

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