

# Desert Ecology

Ishwar Prakash



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# DESERT ECOLOGY

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and  
The National Academy of Sciences, Allahabad

*Edited by*

**ISHWAR PRAKASH**

Professor of Eminence  
Central Arid Zone Research Institute  
Jodhpur - 342001 India



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# Foreword

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Deserts, by definition, are zones of scarcity and hardships, yet some of the oldest civilizations have emerged in these areas. The arid zones exhibit a spectacular and vivid biotic diversity and an interesting rural environment, dominated as everywhere else, by Man. The desert dwellers humans, animals and plants — are generally well adapted to face problems of paucity of water, food and shelter and until recently an excellent equilibrium had been maintained between the resources available in these areas and their utilization so that the ecological balance had not been seriously disturbed. However, in the second half of the present century, developmental activities initiated in the deserts to cope the problems associated with the exalation of human as well as livestock populations have brought, in their trail, considerable deterioration in desert habitat and ecology which has attracted the attention not only of national agencies but also international organizations like UNESCO, UNEP and FAO. It is felt that adequate and urgent steps should be taken to highlight the seriousness of the impact of man's activities and devise ways and means to combat the processes of desertification.

The Great Indian Desert or the Thar has been a priority area of concern for the Government of India as well as of environmentalists. Serious research and development activities are being carried out to enhance the productivity of our arid lands, based on principles of ecological management. In this context the work of the Central Arid Zone Research Institute, Jodhpur, India needs special mention.

When the University of Rajasthan, Jaipur invited the National Academy of Sciences, India to hold its 56th Session at Jaipur it was felt that not only the place (Jaipur is geographically located at the fringe of the Thar) but also the time was appropriate to use the opportunity to hold a National Symposium on Desert Ecology. The proposal received wide support and the Symposium was held under the joint auspices of the National Academy of Sciences, India and the University of Rajasthan from October 24th to 27th, 1986. Dr. Ishwar Prakash, Professor of Eminence at the Central Arid Zone

Research Institute, Jodhpur and Professor Dalbir Singh of the Department of Botany, University of Rajasthan, Jaipur kindly agreed to be the Conveners of the Symposium.

On behalf of the National Academy of Sciences, India it is my pleasant duty to record our sense of appreciation and gratitude to Prof. R. P. Agarwal, Vice-Chancellor and Prof. A. S. Kapoor, Department of Zoology, University of Rajasthan for their unceasing help and cooperation in every way in making local arrangements for the Symposium, to Prof. Ishwar Prakash and Prof. Dalbir Singh for acting as Conveners and finally to Dr. Ishwar Prakash, once again, for the arduous job of editing the Proceedings.

I also convey my gratitude to Messrs Scientific Publishers, Jodhpur for publishing the Proceedings in its present form.

**U. S. SRIVASTAVA**  
General Secretary  
National Academy of Sciences, India  
Allahabad-211002

Allahabad  
15th December, 1987

# Editorial

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It was indeed a happy occasion when the National Academy of Sciences and the University of Rajasthan decided to pool their intellectual and material resources for organizing a National Symposium on Desert Ecology in Jaipur during October 24-27, 1986. The choice of the theme for this symposium was most appropriate, “conquest of the desert” or “combating desertification” being enormously challenging tasks, particularly in view of the steep growth rates of both human and livestock population in the Thar desert. The ever-increasing demands on this scarcity stricken arid land for resources for the sustenance of life have been stressing the desert ecosystem beyond its limit of resilience. And then, when drought strikes here — as it does almost every 3 years — famine stalks the land, bringing untold miseries to man and his beasts alike. Ecologists believe that we are fast approaching the point of no return when the productivity of the desert biome in Rajasthan, even in good rainfall years, will be far below its potentiality. And, as the human and livestock pressure on the land increases, the desertification process would intensify. The potentially disastrous end-result of this web of man-animal-environment interactions warrants thorough and pragmatic analysis by experts drawn from various disciplines. The National Symposium proved to be a good forum for this purpose. Hopefully, the Proceedings of the Symposium will be of use to planners, scientists and technocrats in formulating integrated regional development schemes for the desert tract.

I thank the National Academy of Sciences for entrusting me with the responsibility of editing the Proceedings, and seeing the material through the press. In this task, I have received much enthusiastic technical and secretarial help from my colleagues — Dr. Mohd. Idris, Mr. B. K. Soni and Mrs. Bhavani Bhaskaran. I thank them all.

**Ishwar Prakash**

June 26, 1988  
Central Arid Zone Research Institute  
Jodhpur-342 001, India.

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## Contributors

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I. P. ABROL

Dy. Director General  
ICAR, Krishi Bhawan  
New Delhi-110 001.

M. M. BHANDARI

Prof. of Botany  
University of Jodhpur  
Jodhpur-342 001.

NAGENDRA BHARDWAJ

University of Rajasthan  
Jaipur-302 004.

H. C. BOHRA

Central Arid Zone Research  
Institute  
Jodhpur-342 003

P. C. CHATTERJI

Central Arid Zone Research  
Institute  
Jodhpur-342003

S. S. DHABRIYA,

Sr. Prof. Head  
Remote Sensing Division  
Birla Institute of Scientific  
27, Malviya Industrial Area  
Jaipur-302017.

R. P. DHIR,

Director  
National Remote Sensing Centre  
CAZRI Campus  
Jodhpur-342003.

P. K. GHOSH

Central Arid Zone Research  
Institute  
Jodhpur-342 003

D. P. GOVIL

Forest Department  
Jaipur

S. P. GOYAL

Wildlife Institute of India  
Dehra Dun-220 003.

JAGDISH P. GUPTA

Central Arid Zone Research  
Institute  
Jodhpur 342 003

N. L. JOSHI

Central Arid Zone Research  
Institute  
Jodhpur-342 003

T. I. KHAN

Indira Gandhi Centre  
University of Rajasthan  
Jaipur-302003

A.N. LAHIRI

Central Arid Zone Research  
Institute  
Jodhpur 342 003

VINOD MAINA

University of Rajasthan  
Jaipur-302 003.

S. P. MALHOTRA

Central Arid Zone Research  
Institute  
Jodhpur 342 003

H. S. MANN

D-42 Sarabha Nagar  
Ludhiana-141 001 (Punjab)

C. M. MATHUR  
Chief Conservator of Forests  
19, Gopalbari  
Jaipur-302 001.

D. MISHRA  
Central Arid Zone Research  
Institute  
Jodhpur 340 003.

G. S. NATHAWAT  
University of Rajasthan  
Jaipur-302 004.

S. PATHAK  
J. K. Synthetic Limited  
Kota-342 003.

ISHWAR PRAKASH  
Professor of Eminence  
Central Arid Zone Research  
Institute  
Jodhpur-342 003.

Y. S. RAMA KUMAR  
Central Arid Zone Research  
Institute  
Jodhpur-342 003.

G. G. S. N. RAO  
Scientists S-2 (Agri. Met)  
Central Soil & Salinity  
Research Institute  
Karnal.

B. V. RAMANA RAO  
Senior Climatologist  
Central Institute for Dryland  
Agriculture, Santosh Nagar  
P.O. Saidabad  
Hyderabad-500 659.

S. K. SAXENA  
Central Arid Zone Research  
Institute  
Jodhpur-342 003.

K. A. SHANKARNARAYAN  
Central Arid Zone Research  
Institute  
Jodhpur-342 003.

K. P. SHARMA  
Indira Gandhi Centre  
University of Rajasthan  
Jaipur-302 003.

P. SHARMA  
Central Arid Zone Research  
Institute  
Jodhpur-342 003.

R. P. SRIVASTAVA  
Prof. of Entomology  
Sukhadia University  
Udaipur.

B. B. VASHISHTHA  
Central Arid Zone Research  
Institute  
Jodhpur 342 003.