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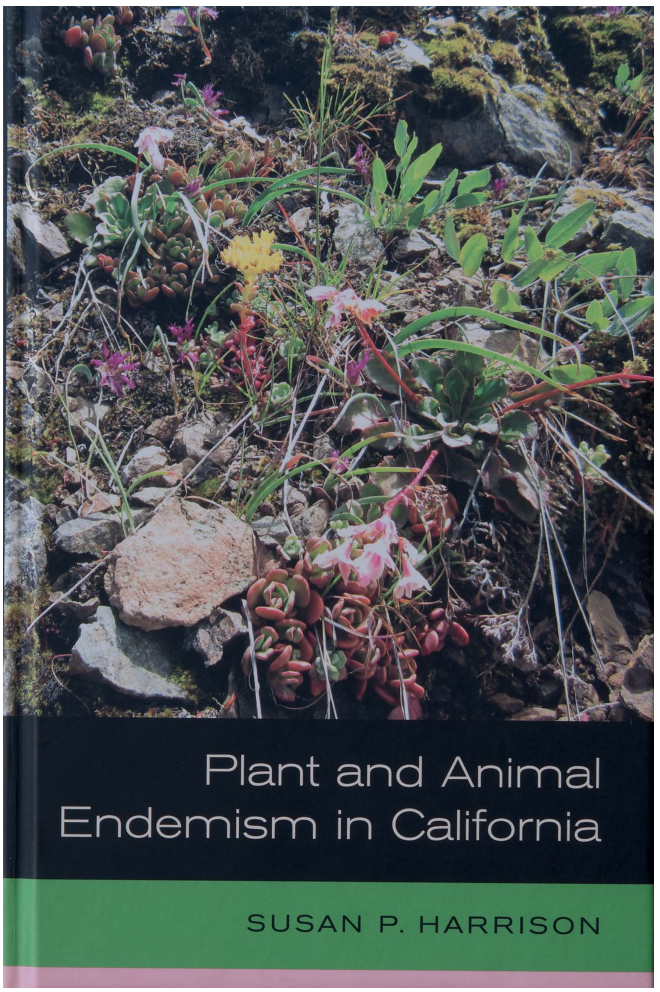
BOOK REVIEW

S.P. Harrison (2013)
Plant and Animal Endemism in California
ix +189 pp., 41 illustrations
Berkeley, University of California Press
ISBN 978-0-520-27554-6



When referring to California, even non-biologists are aware of the vast species richness that characterizes the "El Dorado state", being one of the richest and most biodiverse regions in the world. In terms of superlatives California accommodates the world's tallest, largest and oldest trees. However, the El Dorado state has much more to offer in the sense of biological uniqueness, because this is where the book is all about, plant and animal endemism in California.

It is always delicate to discuss a topic such as endemicity within a non-natural geographic unit such as a country or another kind of political division knowing that species will not stop dispersing when arriving at a political border. Also the endemism concept has been under debate (Kruckeberg & Rabinowitz 1985), bearing in mind that all species can be considered as endemics to some region at a certain geographic level (earth as highest geographical level). All these issues have been carefully taken care of in the introduction of the book and it is clear that the author has left nothing to chance. Although the focus of the book is mainly on the endemicity in the state of California, most of the content deals with plants and animals in the California Floristic Province, which makes up to 70% of the El Dorado state. Because the California Floristic Province is also present in small parts of Oregon and Nevada (USA) and Baja California (Mexico) the biodiversity in these regions is discussed as well. Because of this high degree of overlap between the state of California and the California Floristic Province, endemism in California can indeed be considered as a natural phenomenon and not just the outcome of political boundaries.

Because animal and plant biodiversity in California are obviously connected to an irregular topography, different geological substrates and climate zones, the book first presents a brief overview on California's evolutionary history before going into detail about plant and animal endemism. Although Californian animal endemism has received less attention in the past than plant endemism, the author did not spend too much pages discussing plant endemism. Instead, a good equilibrium was found to report on patterns of endemicity in both plant and animal lineages. The book not only evaluates classic evidence on endemism in California, also modern studies are taken into account, thereby providing a general overview on plant and animal endemism. In addition, the author assembled information that was never synthesized before and thus presents valuable information for specialists on the subject. California is not only known for its large biological diversity, also rapid population growth and urban pressure on the environment characterize the El Dorado state. As a result many natural habitats and their endemics are under severe threat. That this is an important issue for the author is clear since a whole chapter was dedicated on conservation challenges in California's endemic-rich landscape. Finally, botanists are provided with a (preliminary) list of plant endemics however zoologists have unfortunately no list of endemics to look forward to.

To conclude, the book is a valuable reference on the subject and should be on everyone's bookshelf interested in endemism and/or Californian biodiversity.

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REFERENCES

Kruckeberg A.R., Rabinowitz D. (1985) Biological aspects of endemism in higher plants. Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics 16: 447–479. http://dx.doi.org/10.1146/annurev.es.16.110185.002311