

# Preface

My interest in animals has existed through most of my life, originally stimulated at a young age by my grandfather. As a professor, I have regularly given lectures on 'Animals as ecological agents' to students in physical geography and landscape ecology. In 1999, I published a first book on that issue. A second, extended edition followed 3 years later (Holtmeier 2002). Both editions, however, were published in the German language, thus automatically restricting its readership. Both books are now out of print. In view of the numerous new publications relevant to the book's topic, and recalling the very positive response to the books by many reviewers and readers, I have been thinking for some time of preparing a third edition. It was clear however that, given the global importance of the subject, it should be written in the English language, thus guaranteeing a wider circulation. Thus, I was delighted when Springer (Dordrecht) agreed to publish an English edition.

The book is addressed to a broader readership rather than simply to experts in the field. It is based on an extensive review of the literature, on my own field experiences and on contributions of my former cooperators. The influences of wild and feral mammals, particularly of herbivores, as well as of birds, insects and soil invertebrates, are demonstrated through examples from all over the world. Their selection out of a wealth of very heterogeneous and often widely scattered literature has been an exacting task. This presentation by example, however, allows us to go deeper into details than is possible in textbooks that aim to present a complete overview (e.g., Kratochwil and Schwabe 2001) and seemed to be an acceptable way to explain the heterogeneous and complex interactions of animal populations with their habitats (quality, spatial and temporal structures, landscape use). On the other hand, the great variety that appears from such various settings may heighten the readers' awareness of problems that often arise when applying results of local studies to other landscapes. Thus, hasty generalization that disguises rather than clarifies might be prevented.

The conception of the book has not much changed from its earlier editions. The text has however been revised, partly re-written, completed and re-arranged where necessary. Ample illustration by photos, drawings and diagrams has been retained as well as an extensive updated reference list. However, in view of the immense

wealth of literature on autecology, synecology, population ecology, nature conservation, wildlife and landscape management, this list cannot be complete. Surely, the reader will miss inclusion of one or another familiar publication. Russian publications have only been referred to when translations in the English or German language were available. One may safely assume that a broad readership unable to read Russian would appreciate more high-quality publications such as the monograph on marmots by Bibikov (1996), for example, to be translated into English. The references include many publications that were written in the German language. Anglophone readers seldom or never refer to this relatively extensive literature although it provides much useful interesting information.

I hope this book will contribute to better understanding of the interplay of animals and their habitats and the often important role of animal populations in shaping landscape structures and dynamics.

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Animals' Influence on the Landscape and Ecological  
Importance

Natives, Newcomers, Homecomers

Holtmeier, F.-K.

2015, XXXI, 522 p. 171 illus., 65 illus. in color.,

Hardcover

ISBN: 978-94-017-9293-6