

Microbial Diversity and Bioprospecting. Edited by Alan T. Bull (University of Kent, Canterbury). ASM Press, Washington, DC. 2004. xix + 496 pp. 8 × 11 in. \$129.95. ISBN 1-55581-267-8.

As the title implies, this book is about microbes and their value in bioprospecting, but this book will be of great value to anyone toiling with any source of natural products as leads to drugs, agrochemicals, or other agents of use to mankind. The editor assembled a panel of experts across numerous microbiology specialties and, together, they produced this exceptionally well written treatise on the critical issues that confront those bioprospecting the microbial riches of the world.

After a brief introduction on the rationale for exploring and exploiting biological diversity, the book is divided into eight substantive sections or topic areas: Microbial Diversity—the Resource; Microbial Ecology—the Key to Discovery; Biogeography and Mapping Microbial Diversity; Bioinformatics; Prospecting—the Targets; Conservation of Microbial Gene Pools; and Convention on Biological Diversity—Implications for Microbial Prospecting. The book then concludes with a brief chapter on the value of biodiversity, by an economist, with various economic formulas and calculations.

This reviewer could find but one mistake in the text, and it had nothing to do with microbiology. Chapter 39, on the convention on biodiversity and benefit sharing, discusses an agreement between an Australian pharmaceutical company, AMRAD, and the Western Australian Department of Conservation and Land Management, CALM, to access and commercialize compounds from a species of smokebush, *Conospermum*, and refers to the active agent as an antitumor compound. The pharmacological activity in question was actually anti-HIV activity.

While the book is well indexed and numerous references are provided in each of the 44 chapters, the book is not intended as a comprehensive review, but rather a philosophical overview with a sense of the state of the science in each of the technical areas. There is something for everyone in this book, from advanced undergraduate to long-time veteran principal investigators. The text is thought-provoking, as much as it is informative. This book is heartily recommended to any individual who can afford it and to all institutional libraries, academic, government, and industrial.

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