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BOOK REVIEW

Man, Crops and Pests in Central America, G. Ordish. Oxford, Pergamon Press Ltd., 1964. Pp. x, 119.

This little book is presented as Volume 3 of the Biology in Action Series of the Commonwealth and International Library. The publisher's blurb on the back cover claims that it will "prove extremely interesting and informative to agricultural economists". However agricultural economists are clearly not its main audience.

The book does provide interesting reading. The field of Biology in Action is by no means narrowly defined and the discussion ranges effortlessly from the history of the Aztec and Mayan civilizations and the Spanish conquest of Central America to a brief travel-book description of the present way of life, diet and type of housing of the Indians and then to an account of the life cycles of some important pests of crops and the control methods employed against them. The style in which these topics are spanned is racy and informative. The book is packed with odd bits of information on how the British came to drink tea instead of coffee, how to prepare and eat tortillas and frijoles, how not to poison yourself when you get a blocked nozzle during spraying, how serendipity produced a control for downy mildew of vines, how to overcome nervousness during an earthquake and the like.

With a commendable economy of words the author deals effectively with a number of misguided ideas on pest control problems. He exposes the nostalgia for a simpler world with less artificial conditions of agricultural production as a yearning for a Utopia which never really existed. He clearly indicates the limits of biological control methods.

A balanced ecological approach to pest control problems is advocated but not developed in any detail. The readability of the book will recommend it for school use and to general readers with an insatiable interest in the world about them. However, agricultural economists seeking an introduction to the technical problems of pest control will have to look elsewhere for a more systematic, less wide-eyed treatment of the subject.

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