

## Book reviews

**Karoo veld: Ecology and management**, Karen J. Esler, Sue J. Milton, W. Dean, J. Richard (Eds.), Briza Publications, Pretoria, South Africa, 2006, ISBN: 1 875093 52 4. Recommended price R169.95 (VAT inclusive). Also available in Afrikaans: *Karoo Veld: Ekologie en Bestuur*. Soft cover edition with 214 pages, 350 colour photographs, 34 text figures including 14 charts, and 9 maps. Email: [books@briza.co.za](mailto:books@briza.co.za) or [pamelawood@metroweb.co.za](mailto:pamelawood@metroweb.co.za)

The greater part of the south-western and western parts of South Africa has an annual rainfall of less than 500 mm and can be described as Karoo veld. Rainfall is extremely erratic over most of the area and can vary from zero in some years to floods the next. This vast region is characterized by extreme heat, cold and drought and for the most part the scenery is spectacularly wild and dramatic — from the vast open plains of the central Great Karoo to the rugged fold mountains of the Western Cape and the Little Karoo. Here the visitor may encounter flash floods, dust storms, extreme cold, frost and snow as well as serene beauty and wide, uncluttered vistas — this is a country that engenders many strong emotions in a person ranging from awe and wonder to fear and even boredom! However, by digesting the copious information contained in the various sections and appendices of this book, the reader gains an immense appreciation and respect for the Karoo, the plants and creatures that live there and the farmers that make a living in this seemingly hostile and capricious environment.

Many of the farmers in these areas are acutely aware of the challenges of managing the scarce resources available to them from year to year in a sustainable fashion. However, there are also many examples of gross abuse and destruction of delicate Karoo ecosystems due to overstocking and bad veld management which can be largely ascribed to ignorance, greed and indifference.

The book consists of 4 parts:

Part 1. **Karoo Veld Ecology** (Climate, Hydrology, Soil, Geology and topography): background information required for veld assessment.

Part 2. **Karoo Veld Management** (Management philosophy, Livestock grazing management, Game management and Veld and wetland rehabilitation): practical advice for veld, animal, soil and water resource management.

Part 3. **Veld Assessment and Monitoring** (Quick multi-criterion veld assessment, Objective grazing capacity assessment, Keeping grazing records, Drawing your own conclusions, Examples of Karoo veld from good to degraded): a simple six-point scoring method enabling the land user to reach conclusions about the condition of the veld.

Part 4. **Appendices**: The appendices are extensive and include such useful information as an extensive glossary of terms, palatability and grazing indices, a well illustrated section on invasive alien weeds, Large Stock Unit (LSU) equivalents, a list of useful books and pamphlets, a list of consultants, and a well illustrated picture list of common Karoo plants grouped according to habit, e.g. shrubs and trees, grasses, and parasites. These short descriptions include the scientific binomial name, family name, a short habitat description and any vernacular names referred to in the text.

One observation that this reviewer has to make is the quaint use of vernacular names throughout the text of this book rather than scientific names. It is hereby acknowledged that this book is written primarily for use by the Karoo farmer and not only by the scientist, it is nevertheless a little tiresome to have to refer repeatedly to the list of scientific names and their vernacular equivalents under appendix B to make sense of names such as “ganna”, “duinekweek” and “hairynipple”. Here a copy of the relevant appendix makes a handy “bookmark” and a quick reference while perusing the text.

*Karoo Veld* is a well presented, practical and engaging publication which will have wide appeal. The many excellent figures and colour photographs are a worthy addition to the text and serve to dramatically illustrate many of the points raised during the discussions. This is essential reading for the established or emerging Karoo farmer, nature conservationist, student, researcher, or just the average civilian with an innate curiosity and strong desire to learn more about this extraordinary ecosystem — a veritable mine of information at an affordable price.

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**Hydroponics — A practical Guide for the Soilles Grower — 2nd Edition, J. Benton Jones Jr., CRC Press, 2005. Recommended price £49.99. ISBN: 0-8493-3167-6. Webmail: [www.tandf.co.uk](http://www.tandf.co.uk)**

The book opens with a very important fundamental reflection “...Growers will need to better control the rooting environment