

BARTH, H.-J. & BÖER, B.: *Sabkha Ecosystems – Vol. I: The Arabian Peninsula and Adjacent Countries. Tasks for Vegetation Science 36. Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht, 2002, 354 S., ISBN 1-4020-0504-0.*

The term “sabkha” stands for flat salt-crusted deserts. Mainly derived from its meaning in the Arabian Peninsula it describes the extensive, barren, salt encrusted and periodically flooded coastal flats as well as inland salt flats. However, this volume deals generally with such ecosystems and gives also examples from other regions such as Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan or Egypt.

The first part of the book concentrates on sabkha ecosystems within the Arabian Peninsula and adjacent countries. The papers cover a variety of topics and aspects. Holocene and recent geomorphodynamic processes are analysed and the role of the vegetation, especially of halophytes, is worked out. Regional descriptions on the country scale of special forms of sabkha ecosystems are given.

In focus of the second part is on the ecological background. Here, the chemistry of soils and waters, soil formation and the development of biological crusts is described and the role of such semi-desert systems for arthropods and other groups of animals is discussed.

Finally the third part deals with land use and sustainable development. It gives an impression of the perhaps non-evident values of such systems. Nature conservation is addressed and

historical informations about archeological findings are integrated. The role of sabkha ecosystems for the UNESCO is stressed.

To sum up, this volume gives a profound impression about sabkha ecosystems. The hostile environment (high salinity, drought) in combination with dynamic processes makes these ecosystems unique. Working in such sensitive areas, which face a severe decline in many regions, geomorphic processes have to be considered in combination with vegetation development and ecological site conditions.

Any scientist who is interested in such semi-desert ecosystems will profit from the contributions and reviews which are put together in this book.

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