

STRUGGLE OF LIFE or The Natural History of Stress and Adaptation by Martial Rossignol, Line Rossignol, Roelof A.A. Oldeman and Soraya Benzine-Tizroutine with contributions by A. Ambroise, E.A.P. de Bruijn and C. Caisne. Treemail, Heelsum, The Netherlands (<http://www.treemail.nl>). x + 237 pp. 1998. £24.99. Distributed by Natural History Book Service (<http://www.nhbs.com>).

This Franco-Dutch production is a peculiar publication. From the title, one might expect a gentle run through the myriad ways in which living organisms are suited to their natural environments. Instead the book is a curious mixture of plant molecular biology, plant morphology and systems ecology. These somewhat disparate topics are glued together by speculations on the importance of temporal phenomena such as lunar and solar cycles in controlling or influencing biological systems at all levels of organisation from molecules to the biosphere. I probably lack the breadth and depth of perception required to appreciate the underlying message. Other readers of the book may, for instance, be more impressed than I was to learn that a common feature of architectural metamorphosis is 5 – it being the number of base pairs in a half turn of the DNA helix and the frequent number of orders in a complete branch system. Devotees of the molecular genetics of potato tissue cultures, tree architecture or Professor Oldeman's pedantic brand of vegetation ecology (the term 'succession' is banned from the book) may want to acquire a copy. Those with a philosophical turn of mind and a penchant for the 'unexplained' may also care to dip in. There is no particular reason why botanists working in, or on, Southeast Asia should see the book.

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