

Australian Biodiversity and Aboriginal Burning

Hunting with Fire: Women, Foraging and the Ecosystem



Researchers and students from the University of Maine are conducting the first large-scale investigation of the relationship between the contemporary subsistence, burning strategies, and biodiversity among Mardu Aborigines in the Western Desert. A large complement of Australia's ecological web has changed dramatically over the last 200 years. Today, biodiversity in some of the world's most expansive and sensitive deserts is critically threatened, especially as a result of changing fire regimes.

The Desert Mosaic For thousands of years, desert Aborigines have set fire to the arid savanna, creating an environmental patchwork to which much of the desert plants and animals are specifically adapted. Where Aborigines have been removed from their lands, the desert patchwork has often been obliterated with devastatingly large wildfires.





A New Approach to Fire and Land Management

Biodiversity in Australia is a product of a very long and dynamic relationship between people and the physical environment. Understanding this relationship will be critical for dealing with ecological catastrophes that can result with abrupt changes in fire and climate. This research demonstrates that a mosaic of plant and animal communities is maintained through Mardu women's traditional hunting activities that involve burning large patches of desert savanna. Effective fire and land management in this region of the Western Desert will fail along most fronts without incorporating Aboriginal participation and objectives.



Selected References:

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