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Anthropologist Special Issue No. 3: 25-38 (2007)

Human Ecology in Anthropology: Past, Present, and Prospects

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KEYWORDS History of Ecological Anthropology. Ecosystems. Multidisciplinary Studies

ABSTRACT Ecological interests in anthropology date back to the 1930s or earlier, but some work in anthropology is based on the natural history and population biology of Charles Darwin. Anthropology, as a science made up of diverse subfields, has selectively incorporated ecological principals and knowledge over the years. Incorporation of ecological ideas has been hampered by cyclic paradigm shifts in the dominant subfield of sociocultural anthropology. Other divisive issues that have prevented a unified science of human ecology in anthropology are: (1) tension between scientific and humanistic (and applied) anthropology, (2) a modest amount of biophobia in the social sciences, (3) an unwillingness to seek causal bases of behavior beyond human agency, (4) poor training in sciences outside of the social sciences, and (5) limited ability to attack problems by testing hypotheses and good scientific design. Despite these widespread problems in anthropology, there are many anthropologists who take scientific and materialistic approaches to problem solving and are receptive to ecological approaches in the social sciences and collaborative, multidisciplinary work. Some of this work is cited and prospects for a positive future in research are suggested.