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Sommario/riassunto

Summarising the state of knowledge about biodiversity in drylands, this text seeks to identify questions and strategies for future research and to lay out guidelines for management of biodiversity in desert and semidesert regions. The continuing sensitivity of drylands to desertification, the fact that they occupy 40% of the world's terrestrial area, and the increasing human populations in these regions, make the understanding of their biodiversity and its changes over time of central importance. Drylands also provide a natural laboratory to address general questions about biodiversity, ecological succession, etc., because the relative spareness of the landscape allows one to isolate all the variables more effectively than can be done in biologically richer terrains.