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News headlines are forever reporting diseases that take huge tolls on humans, wildlife, domestic animals, and both cultivated and native plants worldwide. These diseases can also completely transform the ecosystems that feed us and provide us with other critical benefits, from flood control to water purification. And yet diseases sometimes serve to maintain the structure and function of the ecosystems on which humans depend.

Gathering thirteen essays by forty leading experts who convened at the Cary Conference at the Institute of Ecosystem Studies in 2005, this book develops an integrated framework for understanding where these diseases come from, what ecological factors influence their impacts, and how they in turn influence ecosystem dynamics. It marks the first comprehensive and in-depth exploration of the rich and complex linkages between ecology and disease, and provides conceptual underpinnings to understand and ameliorate epidemics. It also sheds light on the roles that diseases play in ecosystems, bringing vital new insights to landscape management issues in particular. While the ecological context is a key piece of the puzzle, effective control and understanding of diseases requires the interaction of professionals in medicine, epidemiology, veterinary medicine, forestry, agriculture, and ecology. The essential resource on the subject, Infectious Disease Ecology seeks to bridge these fields with an ecological approach that focuses on systems thinking and complex interactions.