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Prolonged seasonal drought affects most of the tropics, including vast areas presently or recently dominated by 'dry forests'. These forests have received scant attention, despite the fact that humans have used and changed them more than rain forests. This volume reviews the available information, often making contrasts with wetter forests. The world's dry forest heterogeneity of structure and function is shown regionally. In the neotropics, biogeographic patterns differ from those of wet forests, as does the spectrum of plant life-forms in terms of structure, physiology, phenology and reproduction. Biomass distribution, nutrient cycling, below-ground dynamics and nitrogen gas emission are also reviewed. Exploitation schemes are surveyed, and examples are given of non-timber product economies. It is hoped that this review will stimulate research leading to more conservative and productive management of dry forests.