

Book Reviews

Coffee and Health: Banbury Report 17. Edited by BRIAN MACMAHON and TAKASHI SUGIMURA. New York: Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory. 1984. 259 pages. \$47.50 USA, \$57.00 elsewhere. ISBN 0 87969 217 0.

A conference on this theme was held in October 1983 and was attended by distinguished authorities representing a great variety of disciplines. Sessions were included on the chemistry of coffee, on the relationship of the product to mutagenesis, physiological and behavioural effects produced by coffee and in particular the relationship of the product to human carcinogenesis.

The popularity and prevalence of coffee need no emphasis. In the USA the average national consumption is in excess of 2 cups per day; higher levels of consumption are found in Canada and in areas of Central and South America and Western Europe while the highest *per capita* rate in the world, double that in the USA, is in the Scandinavian nations. Given this pervasive distribution even very minor considerations questioning the safety of the product must be a focus of intense interest to us all.

Papers dealing with the chemistry of coffee stressed the wide variation in the composition and concentration of the bean extract as it is currently consumed. The question of decaffeinated coffee was touched upon and it was concluded that the market in this area was likely to increase in the future. The section on so-called 'coffee correlates' together with the epidemiological complications was one of the best in the book. Here the diversity of such correlates was stressed, attention being given in turn to socioeconomic factors, racial and ethnic differences, religion, smoking, diet, exercise and a plethora of psychosocial parameters.

But the epicentre of the book was the relationship of coffee to human carcinogenesis and the papers presented in this area, although varying in standard, tended to be reassuring. As regards breast cancer there was no evidence that coffee consumption affected the incidence of the disease. With respect to bladder and ovarian cancer too the balance of evidence was to the effect that there was no association. With cancer of the pancreas, however, the situation was less clear and the results reported at the Conference were variable. Obviously this is an area in which much further work is necessary. The book represents an important contribution to a field of great significance and complexity. It should be widely read by all health professionals who have an interest in environmental medicine.

JOHN A. LORAINÉ
Department of Community Medicine
University of Edinburgh

Genetics of Populations. By PHILIP W. HEDRICK. London: Wadsworth International. 1983. 629 pages. \$45.25. ISBN 0 86720 011 1.

Genetics of Population is a comprehensive textbook which should find a niche in Population Genetics courses at the advanced undergraduate and graduate levels. Beginning with an assessment of the amount and deposition of genetic variation present in natural populations at all levels of genetic organization, Hedrick then derives the relationship expected between gene and genotype frequencies in idealized populations in which no evolutionary forces operate. Mating systems, natural selection, random