Book Review

A Field Guide to Malayan Palms. The study of the classification and identification of Palms with their large leaves, spathes and inflorescences much too bulky for preservation on the normal herbarium sheet, has always been a rather specialised one, and has generally been left to experts—one thinks of von Martius, Beccari, L. H. Bailey, Furtado and Corner, to mention only a few. In view of the enormous biological interest and economic value of the family, this is an unfortunate situation, which Dr Whitmore has sought to remedy, at least as far as Malaya is concerned. The main section of his book* consists of descriptions of all the genera of Palms in Malaya, both wild and cultivated, and accounts of the commoner or more important species. The descriptions concentrate on easily observed features and employ a restricted taxonomic vocabulary, which makes them easy for non-specialists to use. A series of illustrations, including silhouettes of most of the species described (a particularly valuable feature as the 'facies' of a Palm species is generally characteristic, though difficult to describe in words) complements the descriptive part, and the use of the two together should enable anyone interested to identify the plants as they occur in the field. Taxonomic niceties, such as synonomy, typification, etc., are reduced to a minimum, as is appropriate in a book of this kind, but the indexes, bibliography and notes on the species direct the user to the sources of such information if it is required.

The introductory part of the book consists of a number of short chapters on Palms in relation to the rest of the Monocotyledons, Palm structure, cultivation, and taxonomy at the subfamily level, as well as a geographically based listing of the more prominent Palms to be found in various regions of Malaya. All of these chapters contain material of great interest, which should stimulate the study of Palms, not only in Malaya, but in all parts of the world where they grow, either naturally or in cultivation. The book also contains a short glossary of the unavoidable taxonomic jargon, a check list of all the Palms known from Malaya (including synonyms), and indexes to the Malay, Chinese and English names, as well as the more usual Latin ones. Sixteen pages of black and white photographs, all of good quality, complete the work.

This is a book that can be unreservedly recommended to anyone interested in Palms in any part of the world; its use in Malaya should provoke further study which is certain to produce new and valuable information about their biology, taxonomy and distribution.

The book is well produced, and seems robust enough to withstand reasonable field use. The dust jacket is particularly attractive.

J. Cullen

* T. C. Whitmore. Palms of Malaya. xvi, 129pp, 106 figs., 16 plates, maps on end-papers. Oxford University Press. Price £7.25p.