Book Review

Plants of Malawi. Malawi is a country with a wealth of beautiful and fascinating plants, many of them growing in really splendid surroundings. On the botany of the country there is a small technical literature but popular accounts are almost entirely lacking. Mrs. Moriarty's book* will therefore receive a warm welcome.

The book consists of 80 colour plates depicting some 366 plants, each of which has about 4–6 lines of text which is briefly descriptive, gives flowering times and tells whereabouts in Malawi the plants may be found. A map giving the main localities cited would have been useful to the newcomer to the country. The plants are arranged by families, so that the user with little botanical knowledge can quickly turn up the relevant plates to see if a plant he has found has been illustrated. Let it be clear, however, that cannot be the main purpose of a book such as this, for it gives only about one chance in ten of finding your plant; perhaps one in five if the range is restricted to those with conspicuous flowers. It may be more profitable to learn some of the plants from the book and then try to find them. What is thoroughly enjoyable for one who has botanized in the country is to browse through the book and recognize old friends.

Just occasionally one realizes with disappointment that the artist has failed to capture her subject. *Lactuca calophylla* (plate 80, fig. 6) is one of those that escaped; so did *Liparis neglecta* (plate 29, fig. 5), perhaps because the flowers are all sideways to the viewer; *Alepidea longifolia* (plate 71, fig. 2), on the other hand, has lost character because the umbels have all been turned to face the artist instead of the heavens, while the single umbel of *Diplolophium buchananii* (plate 71, fig. 1) is too open and, without a sketch to show the peculiar habit or distinctive leaves, may well go unrecognized. That I fear is the certain fate of *Euphorbia hirta* (plate 51, fig. 2).

These, however, are the exceptions. Most of the illustrations are easily recognizable. The three plates of *Eulophia* and two of *Disa* give a splendid idea of the richness of Malawi in ground orchids and there are five other plates devoted to this family. For the larger genera there is a useful little heading giving some generic features.

Two plants deserve special mention. One is the interesting hybrid between *Delphinium leroyi* and *D. dasycaulon*, shown with its parents on plate 33: the other is *Streptocarpus buchananii* (plate 57, fig. 1). This species was discovered by John Buchanan somewhere in the Shire highlands in 1881; since then it has been collected several times in N Malawi and S Tanzania, but never again in S Malawi till Mrs Moriarty found it on the Zomba plateau.

Mrs Moriarty's paintings have two recurrent weaknesses that must be mentioned. One is her tendency to make stems and pedicels too gracefully flexuous (e.g. plate 7, fig. 4; plate 16, fig. 2); the other is to devote too little observation to the attachment of the flower to its parent axis and the presence and position of bracts (e.g. plate 47, fig. 4). The illustrations of *Aneilema* (plate 20, figs. 4 & 5) and *Wurmbea* (plate 16, fig. 3) show both these faults.

It is always easy to criticize. Nothing said here alters the fact that anyone interested in the wild flowers of Malawi (and that should be anyone living in or visiting the country) should fail to get a copy of this book. It was sponsored by the Malawi Society and demonstrates again the Society's keenness in building up a literature on the country.

In 1970 the Malawi Society published Brian Morris's book† on the epiphytic orchids of the country. It is rather late to give this a full review, but it is worth mentioning that the introduction gives a brief summary of the main vegetation zones where epiphytic orchids are found. The main text provides detailed information on all the species found in Malawi, just over one hundred, and many of these are illustrated by the author. This is another brave effort by an enthusiastic amateur to put the knowledge that he has enjoyed acquiring at the disposal of others. Between them these two books should do much to stimulate observations of the flora of Malawi. To myself they are a vivid reminder that two short visits to that country are not enough.

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* Wild flowers of Malawi, by Audrey Moriarty. Pp. viii+166, 80 colour plates. Purnell, Cape Town, 1975. Price 12·50 rands.

† Epiphytic orchids of Malawi, by Brian Morris. Pp. xv+136, 25 figs., 5 colour plates. The Society of Malawi, 1970. Price 5·00 kwachas.
The stocks of both publications are held by the The Society of Malawi, PO Box 125, Blantyre, Malawi.