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## BOOK REVIEW

**Compositae Terrae Natalis.** It is fitting that this volume* should have made its appearance soon after the New Year for it was at this season, to be exact on Christmas Day, 480 years ago that Vasco da Gama sailed into the bay where Durban now is and named the land beyond Terra Natalis. That is history: what is news is that we now have an impressive account of the Natal Compositae and a well-wrought piece of work it is both in presentation and treatment.

The production is by a photo-litho technique but whereas other examples of this style have been cramped and difficult to use, this is well-spaced so that species names stand out and the relevant parts of the treatment (synonymy, description, etc.) are nicely divided off from each other and easy on the eye.

Taxonomic arrangement follows the traditional Benthamian scheme although the sequence of genera is that of Dalla Torre & Harms. There are two keys (indented and lead by numbers) to the 113 genera: the first 12 tribes (including the *Helenieae*) being catered for at the front of the volume, the thirteenth, the *Lactuceae*, is dealt with, almost as a distinct family, near the back, There is also a separate key to tribes and, of course, each genus, other than those that are monotypic, has a key to species of which there are in all about 640. The keys use contrasting characters that are well chosen to bring forth correct determinations though more alternative characters could have been inserted to cope with, for example, an inadequacy of flowers.

The author has been particularly adept at capturing within the space of 8–12 lines a concise pen-picture of the species, yet the language employed throughout is easily readable and uncluttered with the technical jargon of yesteryear. This easy turn of phrase, however, must not obscure the fact that very exacting preparation has gone into these descriptions particularly the 123 species of *Helichrysum* in which it must be no exaggeration to state that the constituent flowers of hundreds of capitula must have been counted to enable the author to write for a particular species "Flowers 231–407, (0–)7–13 female, 224–403 hermaphrodite".

The conversational style, readable though it is, may have been used excessively in this work, which has been produced with an eye to economy, witness the photo-litho technique, and synonymy has been cut down with this end in view. I refer particularly to the notes that follow the descriptions discussing distribution, habitat, flowering time and variation. Is it necessary with every species to spell out that it grows at about so many "metres above sea level?". Careful pruning could have halved the number of words devoted to these purposes without loss of information.

The 25 line drawings, all but one of them of full page size, are of excellent quality. The first three illustrate the forms that corollas, anthers and styles can take, three others are of leaf shapes in difficult genera like *Cineraria* and *Taraxacum* and the remainder depict all or part of a plant with dissections and details of related species around it. The maps on the end-papers show Natal surrounded by the neighbouring territories, those to the north and west at the front of the volume; those to the south at the back. These may be fine for showing the distribution of a species outside Natal but are often insufficient to indicate locality, even in wide terms e.g. "Umzinto distr.", of those within its borders.

* Compositae in Natal by O. M. Hilliard. University of Natal Press, P.O. Box 375, 3200 Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, 1977, 659 pp., 25 figs + 2 maps. Price R. 24.00.

The taxonomic approach, like the arrangement, follows traditional lines and one may be confident that the treatment is correct and that areas of doubt, due mostly to lack of adequate collection, are clearly indicated and discussed. In any event, one can only doff one's hat to anyone who can bring such order to *Helichrysum* and *Senecio* which here contain similar numbers of species. One may, however, quibble at some of the generic interpretation for, to devotees of this family from the northern hemisphere, it does seem a little archaic to call the ox-eye daisy *Chrysanthemum leucanthemum*. The genus *Leucanthemum* must surely be considered sufficiently respectable whatever else one may think of the other segregates of *Chrysanthemum* sens. lat. *Laggera* is a slightly different case for, though it has been shown that the distinctions between it and *Blumea* are untenable, the winged stem does serve in the majority of species as here to separate them. As to *Microglossa* it may be contended that it is no longer a viable genus in that the five species originally described under it by De Candolle have all been transferred to *Psiadia* by various authors, a view that has been upheld by Humbert in his work on the flora of Madagascar which appears to be the centre of the genus.

These criticisms which concern, for the purposes of this work, monotypic genera, are, as I have said, quibbles and the excellence of this volume can scarcely be diminished by them. It must surely stand as the classic and most authoritative account of the Compositae of Natal.

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