Book Review

The Herbs of Dehra Dun.* This flora is designed to serve as an adjunct to the *Forest Flora of the School Circle* by Kanjilal (1901) which was revised and enlarged in 1928 by B. L. Gupta as the *Forest Flora of Chakrata, Dehra Dun & Saharanpur Forest Divisions*.

The introduction gives a readable and informative account of the geography, topography, geology, soil and history of botanical exploration in the area, and finally, the biotic factors largely due to man's influence which have led to the considerable depletion of the local flora. The work itself nevertheless deals with the systematic analysis of 1230 species belonging to 624 genera distributed through 115 families.

The generic key under each family provides such descriptions as there is for the genus. Species are succinctly described in 2–10 lines, followed by short notes on habitat, distribution and sometimes further taxonomic notes are offered. Genera are arranged alphabetically which makes for easy reference but has its disadvantages in families, e.g. Compositae, where one often relies on tribal affinities.

The author sometimes keeps an open mind on classification and offers alternatives, e.g. under *Indigofera astragalina* DC. he points out that it has been reduced by Ali as a synonym of *I. hirsuta* L. but that Gillet maintains both species and provides a key to separate them. Similarly, under *Phaseolus*, the separation between this genus and *Vigna* is keyed out and he concludes that, according to this reasoning, all the species dealt with belong under the latter but continues to describe them as *Phaseolus*, two of them without specific names. Finally on the Fabaceae, the author has not kept abreast of events for he uses the name *Maughania* ("nom. cons. prop.") for the species of *Flemingia*, apparently unaware that the latter name was finally conserved.

The key to families is too facile and many of the characters are those that have traditionally been used. It is too much to hope, such is the diversity of the constituent genera of many families that, even with the best of all possible leads, all families will come out at one go. This, however, has apparently been achieved here, but for Urticaceae step 781 reads "Stamens inflexed in bud. Stinging hairs present". Turning then to the account of this family, one finds that the genera are first of all divided into those in which stinging hairs are present and those in which they are absent! Also in the family key, the proof-reading which throughout the volume is of an excellent standard, has suffered a sad lapse by overlooking the fact that the second part of step 7 appears after the first part of step 10 thus raising the spectre of aquatic Indian members of the Berberidaceae!

On the whole, this flora has been ably worked and is well presented but suffers from its unimaginative keys and lack of illustrations.

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* Herbaceous Flora of Dehra Dun by C. R. Baba, 721 pp. Publications and Information Directorate, CSIR, Hillside Road, New Delhi 110012. 1977. Rs 144.00, $60.00, £22.00.