Book Review

The tangle of tamarisks. The complexity of a genus, or otherwise, can usually be measured by the amount of taxonomic change that it undergoes in successive taxonomic revisions or floristic accounts: the less change the more clear-cut the species, the more change the less clear-cut. *Tamarix* certainly comes into the latter category and a glance at the revision in De Candolle's *Prodromus*, that of Bunge, and the more recent accounts in *Flora URSS* and *Flora Iranica* clearly illustrate this: they share little common ground in taxonomy, nomenclature and characters emphasised.

Baum's work* stemmed from a study of the species in Israel and was later widened to include all described species. It is based on a Ph.D. thesis at the University of Jerusalem and comparison of the validly published version of this (in 1966) with the present revision shows very little change in content.

In the introduction the all too few reliable characters available to the taxonomist are discussed and Baum comes down in favour of the structure of the androecium and disc. Many of the previously used characters appear to be so variable as to be of no, or little, practical use; as, for instance, the frequently stressed contrast between vernal and aestival racemes. In all, 54 species are recognised—out of a total of about 200 available binomials. Many of the main divisions in his key to the species are based on features of leaf, bract or stamen, and the contrasts in the couplets are, at least on paper, very clear. In such a complex genus as this it is doubtful if a bifurcating key really is the best guide to identification and some kind of synoptic key might well have been more helpful. There are dot-distribution maps for all the species, most of which are in SW and C Asia, but in some cases the dots seem surprisingly thin on the ground. All the species are illustrated by drawings of young twigs, bracts and flower parts. The synonymy given is full and it must have been an arduous task trying to typify the names. However, despite the clarity of all the information given in this revision, I suspect that most people will still find considerable difficulties in naming the average specimen of a *Tamarix*—even with the relatively broad species concept that Baum adopts.

The main criticism of this important contribution to our knowledge of the tamarisks must be that although the volume bears the date 1978 it really is of 1966 vintage—but this is not made clear to the reader. Many new collections have been made in the intervening years, especially in Iran and Pakistan, and it is a great pity that the author was not able to use these new sources of information and generally up-date his obvious great knowledge of the genus.

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* *The genus Tamarix* by Bernard R. Baum. 209 pages, 54 plates and 54 maps. 1978. Jerusalem. The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities. Price $25.