Notes RBG Edinb. 40(1):62 (1982)

BOOK REVIEW

Mosses of Singapore and Malaysia. In SE Asia mosses form a rich component of an even richer flora but their study has often been neglected or considered the preserve of a few enlightened specialists. Their relatively insignificant size coupled with the lack of suitable keys for identification has frequently been daunting and I, for one, have often wished for some simple and practical manual. This handbook*, a companion volume to *The Ferns of Singapore Island* by the same author, is a welcome publication. It is a very readable account of some mosses occurring on the island of Singapore and *peninsular* Malaysia. From a total of more than 600 species, many of which are little known and seldom collected, 126 have been selected. These include all mosses recorded on Singapore island itself.

The introduction outlines some general characteristics of this plant group. 'How to study mosses' gives hints on collecting. A list of families and species to be described in the text follows. Two keys to genera are provided: a general key and one for mosses found only on Singapore Island and the Malayan lowlands, excluding limestone habitats. The keys are admirably concise and with good contrasting characters, but some measurements should be given for leads like 'leaf cells wide versus small'.

The main part of the handbook is an account of the families and species, with descriptions, localities, occasional ecological notes and other points of interest. The descriptions, though brief, are adequate.

Ninety-six species are illustrated and figures are situated conveniently through the text. Some of the line-drawings are a trifle thin and could be improved; habit, however, is notoriously difficult to convey and at least the drawings are not stylised.

A glossary of technical terms, which have in any case been kept to a minimum, enables the key to be used effectively. An appendix giving Greek and/or Latin origins of family and species names is also useful for the non-biologist beginner who may otherwise be stumped by unfamiliar sounding, scientific names. A short list of some relevant papers for further reading and an index completes the book.

I have little to say in criticism of this work, however it is a pity so many typographical errors have crept past the proof-reader; I listed more than 25 in my perusal of the text.

This modest volume (which would slip easily into the most cramped bookshelf) at an even more modest price (equivalent to that of a ham salad at the 'Marina' — the R.B.G.E.'s 'local') can be recommended to undergraduates, research workers, or non-specialist naturalists with an interest in, or wishing to commence, a study of tropical mosses. Several people including myself, with little previous knowledge, have used it successfully to run mosses down to genus and species; this amply reflects the usefulness of the publication.

KIT TAN

**Mosses of Singapore and Malaysia* by A. Johnson. 126 pp. incl. 96 figs, flexicover. Singapore University Press, Kent Ridge, Singapore 0511. 1980. S$12 (S$8 for Malayan Nature Society members).