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BOOK REVIEW

The Flora of Bhutan

The first part of a new continental Asian local Flora, *The Flora of Bhutan**, has appeared. A total of about 10 parts covering three volumes is expected during the next few years at the rate of one part per year. Each part has its own index, and there will be a cumulative index at the end of each volume. A key to families and a glossary of botanical terms are promised in the final volume. Being the first Flora of the country, the appearance of this production is a most important event. Until now the only Flora covering Bhutan was the famous Hooker's *Flora of British India* (*FBI*), today quite out-of-date nomenclaturally and besides without keys, two deficiencies making it difficult to use for other than well-trained botanists.

The chapter on botanical exploration mentions all important collectors in Sikkim and Bhutan and is especially detailed concerning collecting localities in Bhutan—features which may be of great assistance to future monographers dealing with difficult, handwritten labels. New to the reviewer is the fact that not all specimens labelled Bhutan originate from the Bhutan of today. The collecting density index at the time of publishing is about 65 specimens per 100 sq km, which is about right for preparing the first edition of a Flora.

The chapter on classification of the vegetation gives a concise outline of the various vegetation zones with characteristic species mentioned. It is followed by an interesting chapter on the phytogeography, and in addition a list of horticultural introductions is given.

The introductory chapters are concluded with a bibliography of Bhutan and Sikkim containing the 129 most important publications.

The taxonomic arrangement conforms largely to the Englerian system, beginning with the gymnosperm families; while the angiosperms begin with the amentiferous families. Keys to genera and to species are of the bracketed type, but the second lead in each couplet is not numbered, which may confuse the reader if the leads are of several lines. The sequence of genera usually follows *FBI*. The keys within genera are not to individual but to groups of species. This system works much better than the reviewer expected, since the commonest species in each group is given a more detailed description, to which the other species are contrasted by mentioning mostly diagnostic characters. A test in the herbarium proved that the keys function well. As an additional aid to identification, in most genera a species has been illustrated by an excellent line drawing showing diagnostic characters. For each species the distribution in Bhutan and occurrence in Sikkim are given. The nomenclature is thoroughly revised to ensure the use of correct names. In all cases, where the name differs from that in *FBI*, the *FBI* synonym is given in order to facilitate comparison in the two Floras.

Being prepared by only two authors, this Flora has well-balanced, homogeneous treatments of the various families. It will become a magnificent tool in the hands of all concerned with the study of montane floras in tropical South-East Asia, and we are only longing for its completion.

BERTEL HANSEN

* Grierson, A. J. C. & Long, D. G., *Flora of Bhutan*. Including a record of plants from Sikkim. Vol. 1 part I. Introductory chapters pp. 5–43, treatments of the first 24 families pp. 44–175, indices pp. 177–186, 1 table, 2 maps and 14 full-page plant illustrations. Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh, 1983.

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