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"Flora of Samoa", by W. Arthur (Art) Whistler

Reviewed by Rhys Gardner

With keys and descriptions and covering American Samoa and The Independent State of Samoa (formerly Western Samoa), this is the archipelago's first-ever traditional-style Flora (see footnote for publication details). The c. 250 Samoan pteridophytes have not been included, however, "just" the flowering plants: 543 native species (a third of them endemic) and 290 naturalized ones (including 49 possible Polynesian introductions). This still makes for a good-sized tome, and coincidentally, one nearly identical in appearance and heft (strong covers, 2 kg of glossy paper) to the other recent NTBG publication, Sykes' "Flora of the Cook Islands".

As well as being an inveterate traveller and collector, Art Whistler (Fig. 1) was a diligent pre-digital-age photographer, and here his images (nearly 700, at a guess, along with some taken by other botanists) are presented in 159 colour plates. More than two thirds of the flora is shown, from the newest weeds to the native rarities, with a good coverage of large groups like the orchids, *Cyrtandra*, *Elatostema*, *Eumachia* and its look-alike *Psychotria*, *Melicope* and *Syzygium*. I would have liked to have also seen, though, a few of the classical *US Exploring Expedition* and *Icones Plantarum* illustrations, or references to them.

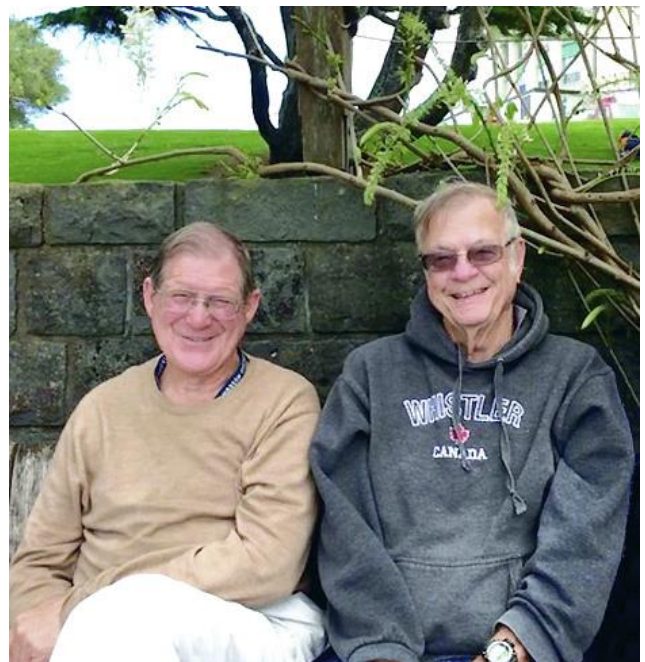


Fig. 1. Art Whistler (right) with Rhys Gardner, at the Magnolia Garden, Auckland Domain. Photo: Alice Campbell, 21 Oct 2019.

Art examined Pacific plant collections from all round the world, including those in the older European

herbaria, and in his 'History of Collecting' section he has been able to sort out, or at least point out, several tangles of attribution, etc. [Young collectors: collect in duplicate, start your numbering from "1", date your specimens and don't leave gaps even if you plan on being resurrected].

Presumably to keep the size of the work within bounds, descriptions of the families and genera have been omitted. Similarly, the keys to the genera and species are non-technical ones and usually involve just flowers, or fruit, or other features easily appreciated in the field. (Stipules are hardly mentioned, many will be pleased to learn). The species descriptions are ample and the keys get reinforcement from a "Distinguishable By" paragraph.

Art visited and collected from every island in the Samoan archipelago. He made numerous first records of its naturalized plants, and this work contains several, little-known, recent ones (like the African forestry tree menace *Maesopsis eminii*, Rhamnaceae), which can be expected to turn up elsewhere in the Pacific, sooner or later. His knowledge of Samoa's native vegetation and its living plants was unrivalled and allowed him to write definitive revisions of two major groups (*Psychotria* and *Syzygium*), and, in several places in the present work, to recognize where the herbarium-based treatments of others might have gone astray. His familiarity with the Samoan language, too, has allowed him to clear

up nomenclatural and ethnobotanical confusions in the older literature. He has been honoured with "*whistler*" in the names of seven Samoan species and has named more than 30 such himself, including the eleven published in the present work (listed in its untitled "Appendix 1", along with seven more which might also require recognition).

For nearly fifty years as a self-employed botanist, keeping afloat through grant-wangling, self-publishing, and carrying out conservation activities, Art had worked towards this Flora. In the latter part of his life, he and his specimens had found a safe haven with Hawaii's National Tropical Botanical Garden, and by 2020 a manuscript had been completed. But he died in Honolulu that year, of coronavirus, one of Hawaii's earliest victims. We owe a debt of gratitude to his colleagues at NTBG and the Smithsonian Institution, who have put much effort into seeing the work through the press: editing it, refining the illustrations, and (a great boon to the general reader) updating its nomenclature and taxonomy. It is a worthy memorial to Art and the cooperation he engendered.

Footnote: Flora of Samoa, published by the National Tropical Botanical Garden, Kauai, 2022. 930 pp., HB 27.5 x 17.5 cm. ISBN 978-0-915809-04-2. US \$100 plus tax and postage.

Mei Nee Lee and Joshua Salter, new Honorary Life Members

Ewen K. Cameron

At a Special General Meeting of the Botanical Society (ABS) on 7 June 2023 with 28 members in attendance, two new honorary life members were proposed, Mei Nee Lee and Joshua Salter, for their contribution as joint Editors of the ABS journal for eleven-and-a-half years, taking over from Dan Blanchon. Ewen spoke in favour of the motion outlining the contributions made by the two members over the years.

Moved: Ewen Cameron

Seconded: Maureen Young

Those in favour: carried unanimously.

Mei Nee Lee (Figs. 1–3)

Member since c.1999, Committee member since 2002 and co-editor of the ABS journal since June 2011 (see Table).

Because of increasing work commitments Mei Nee stood down from the committee and co-editor at the AGM this year. It wasn't until talking with Josh and Helen Preston Jones (the new co-editor) that I more fully understood the complexities of what Mei Nee was actually doing as co-editor – apart from some general editing, receiving and saving all the journal article versions in a system that she