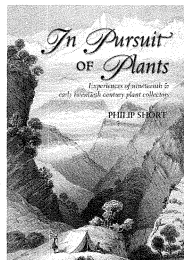


BOOK REVIEWS



IN PURSUIT OF PLANTS

PHILLIP SHORT

2003. 351 p. \$29.95. Hardcover. 45 color photos, 20 b/w illustrations. Timber Press, Portland. www.timberpress.com. ISBN 978-0-88192-635-4

Phillip Short's *In Pursuit of Plants* is an entertaining survey of expedition diaries mostly by 19th and some 20th century botanical collectors. A majority of the diaries are from the archives of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, where Short was the Australian Botanical Liaison Officer in 1991–1992. Currently a plant taxonomist at the Northern Territory Herbarium in Australia, he has spent more than 20 years working in herbaria, initially at the National Herbarium of Victoria. Short holds a Bachelor of Science (Honors) degree from the University of Adelaide and a Doctor of Philosophy from Flinders University of South Australia.

Although the book is full of helpful notes and illustrations, the author provides scant in-depth analysis of the subject matter. A quick vignette introduces each naturalist and then the story speaks for itself. In other words, the book resembles more closely National Geographic Explorer than the writings of Michel Foucault.

The narratives should appeal to both professional plant collectors and lovers of good adventure tales. At first glance, it may seem that naturalists were chosen for this book in the same way that soldiers are chosen for the Medal of Honor—posthumously and after a particularly spectacular death. For the most part, this turns out not to be the case. Indeed, most of the stories include the sort of challenges that will seem familiar to professional collectors today, such as navigation, spiky and otherwise unfriendly flora, hungry and otherwise unfriendly fauna, unfriendly native populations, unfriendly local governments, fever, wars, humidity, poisonous plants and animals, and the ever present threats of dehydration and starvation. Few of the authors, however, actually end up dead—or even maimed, for that matter.

While the challenges facing naturalists in the wild seem to have changed little, I was struck by how much attitudes in general have evolved

in 150 years. Taken directly from the diaries of the adventurers, the narratives allow insight into what these people were actually thinking during their journeys. I often was surprised at how closely the attitudes of white 19th century Europeans matched the stereotypes of this demographic group as portrayed by Rudyard Kipling, Edward Said, or for that matter, Monty Python.

It wasn't just the use of terms like "savages" and "coolies" to describe natives; nor was it G.W. Walker's complaints about the difficulty of collecting from his sedan chair. It was a general attitude among many of the collectors that their complexion alone would serve as safe passage anywhere. For example, from a 21st century perspective, I just knew that R.W. Plant's wandering unannounced and uninvited into Zululand in 1851 could only end badly. I also have to admit that the dramatic irony kept me glued to the book.

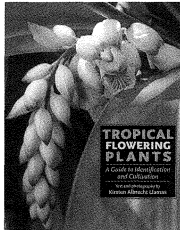
Attitudes have changed in more ways than race relations. Most of the diaries date from a period before conservation took hold and when places such as Africa, Borneo, Australia, and South Asia were thought to have limitless natural resources. As a result, for several of the authors, study of fauna seemed to involve blowing large holes in the fauna with a rifle and sampling the meat. In some cases, the study just involved shooting something to see how long the subject would take to die.

All in all, *In Pursuit of Plants* is a good read. Having consulted a few editorial reviews before delving into the book myself, I found it lighter reading than expected. Short has chosen lively narratives and edited them well.

—Colin Boyle

Marie Selby Botanical Gardens
811 South Palm Avenue
Sarasota, Florida 34236-7726 USA

BOOK REVIEW



TROPICAL FLOWERING PLANTS

KRISTEN ALBRECHT LLAMAS

2003. 424 p. \$69.95. Hardcover. 1553 color photos, 1 map. Timber Press, Portland. www.timberpress.com. ISBN 0-88192-585-3.

Perusing this picturesque volume, the reader has no doubt that Kristen Llamas possesses a deep passion for tropical flowering plants. She has depicted these plants equally well both in the easy-to-read text and in an array of true-to-life photographs of more than 1500 species and hybrids. This tome is the result of many years of dedicated work—years needed to bring about such a colorful tribute to flowering plants of the tropics.

The plants are arranged according to plant families, with family names listed in alphabetical order. For readers unfamiliar with family designations, the index lists plant species with page numbers, making any plant easy to locate in the book. The author follows the latest taxonomic revisions, referencing recent publications by Walter Judd; and hence the most up-to-date family and generic names are used. As a result, some readers, on paging through the book, may be surprised to find Streculiaceae and Tiliaceae among the Malvaceae (Hibiscus Family).

The book treats 128 plant families, 84 known to have epiphytic members, including, of course, Orchidaceae and Bromeliaceae (with *Neoregelia carolinae* 'Meyendorffii' decorating the title page). In an introduction to the Gesneriaceae (subtitled Gesneriad Family), the author mentions "approximately 126 genera of terrestrial and epiphytic herbs, or rarely shrubs from tropical regions worldwide" (which may be on the low side). She then features three of these genera: *Episcia* with 9 species of stoloniferous herbs from South America; *Gloxinia* with 15 species of herbs from tropical America; and

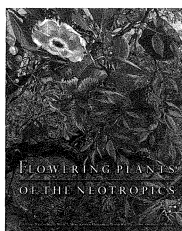
Streptocarpus with approximately 130 species of annual and perennial herbs from tropical Africa, Madagascar, southern China, Southeast Asia, and Indomalaysia. Also provided are a description and color photo of the following species and hybrid: *E. cupreata* 'Check Mate' (carpet-plant, flame-violet, or strawberry begonia), *G. sylvatica* (Bolivian sunset), and *S. × hybridus* (cape primrose or estreptocarpo).

This remarkable compilation of tropical flowering plants, in one volume, promises to be a popular reference book, not only for those living in tropical and subtropical climes but also for plant lovers the world over. This is a book that belongs in every plant lover's library.

After receiving a master's degree in tropical botany from the University of Miami, Kirsten Albrecht Llamas developed the first human cytogenetics laboratory in south Florida. A longtime member of the Tropical Flowering Tree Society, she has provided numerous plant identification updates to The Kampong of the National Tropical Botanic Garden and to Fairchild Tropical Garden. Her lifelong avocation is photography, with an emphasis on nature, culminating in a collection of award-winning photos of flowering tropical plants and publication of this book.

—T.J. Sheehan
Professor Emeritus
Dept. of Environmental Horticulture
University of Florida
Gainesville, Florida

BOOK REVIEW



FLOWERING PLANTS OF THE NEOTROPICS

NATHAN SMITH, SCOTT A. MORI, ANDREW HENDERSON, DENNIS WM. STEVENSON, AND SCOTT V. HEALD, EDITORS

2003. 3616 p. \$80.00. Hardcover. 307 color photos, 258 line drawings, 6 tables. Princeton University Press. <http://www.pupress.princeton.edu>. ISBN 0-691-11694-6.

Much effort has been made to describe and record the natural plant diversity in the region known as the neotropics. Carl Friedrich Philipp von Martius began one of the more significant undertakings. His 40-volume *Flora Brasiliensis*, published in 1906 after more than 60 years of exhaustive research, has within its 20,773 pages, 3811 pen-and-ink plates and 1071 lithographs. More than 22,000 species were described.

In comparison, the nearly 600-page *Flowering Plants of the Neotropics* does not seem so daunting. Nathan Smith of the New York Botanical Garden and his co-authors have assembled in these pages an impressive array of plant knowledge with the able assistance of 150 botanists from around the world.

The geographical area covered by the book is formidable, including all of Central America and more than half of South America, delimited by the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn. First and foremost a reference book, its numerous appendices, scientific names, and botanical jargon make it useful to the university professor or student of botany. Having said that, it will also be of considerable value to those who simply have a passion for plants. The dust jacket, a painting by Michael Rothman, sets the tone. Rich in observation and deft in touch, the dust jacket reflects the care and precision visited upon the entire endeavor.

The bulk of the text is divided into two sections: dicotyledons and monocotyledons. Within these sections, material is organized by family, covering more than 280 plant families. Each section includes information on distribution and habitat, family characteristics, and economic uses of featured genera within a family. Details abound. An entire page is given over to the variations evident in the stipules of representative genera of the family Rubiaceae. Furthermore, we are informed that species of the insectivorous *Drosera* (Sundew) have been used as “homeo-

pathic remedies for cough, corns, warts, eye and ear inflammations, rheumatic joint pain, morning sickness, and liver ailments”—very useful information to be sure, but do read the subsequent warning regarding such remedies!

Of the plant families featured, 84 have epiphytic members. Among these are the Gesneriaceae (subtitled African Violet Family), with three pages devoted to them. The author mentions 133–150 gesneriad genera and 2500–3700 species. Two subfamilies are recognized, the Gesnerioideae and the Cyrtandroideae, and the author notes that the revised classification of Brett and Wiehler nominates the subtribe Coronanthereae for a new subfamily.

The book is well illustrated with pen-and-ink drawings and, sandwiched between dicots and monocots are 64 plates of color photographs. The black-and-white illustrations are exemplary, with the majority of drawings attributed to the accomplished artist Bobbi Angell. Also of particular note is the work of Priscilla Fawcett and William S. Moye, whose illustrations possess a little extra visual punch. Color photographs are always a welcome addition to books of this type, particularly when the images are clear and concise. Such is the case here, where selected plants are photographed against a dark background, which serves to enhance the detail inherent in flower and seedhead. Other plants are photographed in-situ, imparting to the reader a sense of habitat and growth structure.

If you find yourself stumbling over references to an “immature apocarpous fruit” or “stipitate monocarps,” turn to the informative glossary. The editors, affiliated at one time or another with the New York Botanical Garden (NYBG), are Nathan Smith, curatorial assistant, Institute of Systematic Botany (ISB); Scott A. Mori, Nathaniel Lord Britton Curator of Botany, ISB; Andrew Henderson, ISB curator; Dennis Wm. Stevenson, NYBG vice president, and Rupert

Barneby, Curator for Botanical Science; and Scott V. Heald, former ISB curatorial assistant. Those who participated in the production of this book are to be commended. *Flowering Plants of*

the Neotropics makes a fine addition to any library where scientific accuracy, consummate artistry, and a love of natural diversity are appreciated.

—Jay W. Miner
Horticulturist
Marie Selby Botanical Gardens
811 South Palm Avenue
Sarasota, Florida 34236-7726 USA