

BOOK REVIEW

Wildflowers of Southern Western Australia. Margaret G. Corrick, Bruce A. Fuhrer, edited by Alexander S. George. Published by Five Mile Press in association with Monash University, Noble Park, Victoria. 1996. 244 pp. ISBN 1 87597 149 1. Price \$A39.95 (hardcover).

Within a couple of months of its release for sale, stocks of this book have been taken up by an enthusiastic public to such an extent that as I write, it is unlikely that any copies are available for sale. A review therefore may seem redundant. However, this is a new work and a second edition is promised for 1997.

The book is introduced with an overview by Alex George of the physical attributes of the land, geological history and dominant vegetation types represented in Western Australia (divided into the Kimberley, the North-West, the Deserts, the Nullarbor, the Transitional Zone, and the South-West). A more detailed discussion of the vegetation is given for the South-West, the focus of the book. Phytogeographic maps, based on Beard (1980), are also provided and these are used to describe the distribution of the plants treated in the main body of the work. I would like to have seen reference to Beard's classification (in which 4 Botanical Provinces are recognised) in George's overview (in which 6 regions are discussed). There is undoubtedly a fair degree of overlap between the 2 treatments, and without justification for the departure from a widely accepted subdivision of the State (i.e. Beard's), one does wonder why a single system could not have been used throughout.

The main text is rightly devoted to depicting and describing the 755 species (in 53 families) selected to represent the flora of this exceptionally rich area. Rather than follow the trend of many recent guides to group plants of particular regions together, the authors have preferred a listing by family (in alphabetic order) and alphabetically arranged genera and species. This arrangement certainly facilitates the finding of an encountered plant, gives a good chance of identification by comparison with likely related species. Another justification given by the authors for such an arrangement is to allow an appreciation of the diversity contained within the families treated. Their aim is admirably met. The regional, or ecological approach to arrangement of plants in field guides suffers in its inability to deal with species that are widespread or characteristically occur in more than one region or plant association. This shortcoming is avoided by the more systematic approach adopted in this book.

The photographs, mostly by Bruce Fuhrer, vary in quality from superb to excellent, generally allowing appreciation of fine floral detail and beauty, but also providing enough indication of the habit of the plant to allow a confident attempt at identification. Some of the photographs are smaller than I would have liked. Their clarity is such that many could be enlarged considerably without loss of definition. This is undoubtedly a consequence of the inevitable compromise between extent and cost. There is certainly

no wasted space that would enable the images to be enlarged without considerable reformatting of the book.

The selection of species portrayed in the book seems nearly perfect. From my admittedly limited experience, it covers those eye-catching species that are encountered along roadsides and in the various reserves that are visited by travellers generally, but particularly by the many who visit southern Western Australia to experience its diverse and sometimes bizarre botany.

The accompanying descriptions, prepared by Margaret Corrick, are concise without being off-puttingly (for the lay-person) technical. They provide information on the habit and size of the plant, the size and shape of leaves, nature of indumentum when significant, dimensions of flowers, habitat and distribution. Where two or more species are likely to be confused, diagnostic characteristics are given. Each family is introduced by a summary of its attributes, relationships, global distribution and 'titbits' of general interest. Large and/or structurally diverse genera are described individually.

Understandably, there is a rich representation of those families for which the area is well known — Asteraceae, Fabaceae, Myrtaceae, Orchidaceae, Proteaceae — whereas less showy groups — such as Cyperaceae, Poaceae and Restionaceae — seem slightly underdone. This is perhaps forgivable given the difficulty in distinguishing many members of these groups without dissecting spikelets, but I felt at least the very rich Restionaceae flora of the region probably could have received more exposure.

The inclusion of a glossary is to be applauded. Too many non-specialist books ignore the value of a glossary, and must then rely on descriptive terms in the everyday lexicon and in so doing lose precision, or include scientific terminology that is at the one time accurate but baffling to the lay-reader. Some further attention could be devoted to the glossary for the second edition however. It gets off to a bad start with a simple spacing error, causing 'achene' to read as 'achenea'. A loss of comma confuses the definition of 'c.' to 'circa about'. A carpel is, not incorrectly perhaps but incompletely, defined as a 'female reproductive organ'. The term 'malesia' for the region that includes the Philippines (not 'Philipines') warrants capitalisation. 'Trifoliolate' (rather than 'trifoliolate') is defined as 'a compound leaf with three leaflets'.

I could find very few errors or inconsistencies, but to justify my searching, I feel duty-bound to note them. The introduction to the Phylidraceae misspells the family as the Phylidraceae (p. 148). In the discussion of the Rhamnaceae, the genus *Ceanothus* is misspelt 'Ceonothus' (p. 188). The caption to figure 637 should read *Pomaderris* (not 'Pomoderris') *forrestiana* (p. 189). The distribution of *Microcybe multiflora* var. *multiflora* should include Victoria (p. 196). There is some inconsistency in the provision of authors to all epithets where infraspecific taxa are described, e.g. *Banksia sphaerocarpa* var. *caesia* A.S. George (p. 159), but *Conospermum acerosum* Lindley subsp. *hirsutum* E..M Bennett (p. 160).

These are minor quibbles, and I proffer them with reluctance, but they do detract slightly from a work that in other respects is reassuringly authoritative. It is hoped that a second edition will allow for corrections. Despite these minor gripes, I thoroughly recommend *Wildflowers of Southern Western Australia*, and believe it to be among the best, if not the best, of works of the genre (reviewers are obliged to use this term) in this country. I believe it admirably achieves its aim of being a 'valuable reference for

professional botanists and amateur enthusiasts alike'. Further, at \$39.95 (for the first edition at least) it represents exceptional value. But pages of praise pale into insignificance compared to the most resounding acknowledgment of the book's quality, that is, the purchase of the entire print run within 3 months of its publication! If you're not among the many who purchased the first edition, keep on the lookout for the second later this year or early 1998.

Beard, J.S. (1980). A new phytogeographic map of Western Australia. *Western Australian Herbarium Research Notes* 3, 37-58.

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