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## BOOK REVIEWS

**The Concise Flora of Singapore — Gymnosperms & Dicotyledons.** Hsuan Keng (1990). pp. 222, 460 illustrations. (Singapore University Press). Softbound.

This is the first attempt since Ridley in 1900, to produce a flora exclusively of Singapore. Due to its location at the bottom of the Malay Peninsula, the flora of Singapore is virtually an extension of that of the Peninsula with, as Keng states, only a few endemic species. In recent times the flora has been covered by revisionary work for the Flora Malesiana, however many families are still to be completed for this work.

The "Flora" features brief descriptions of both the native and introduced plants of Singapore, the two categories being distinguished at a glance as names of native plants are printed in boldface and those of introduced plants in italics. Keys are provided at the family and generic levels. Keys to the species are probably unnecessary in a concise work of this kind, due to the limited number occurring in each genus. The inclusion of line drawings, with some representatives from nearly all families, is a very useful part of the book. Unfortunately in some cases the drawings are inadequate and have limited value as an identification aid. A list of the illustrations is included in the front of the book, ordered by number corresponding to family and sequence within the family. It would have been more useful had this list been arranged alphabetically, and also to indicate within the text of a species, if that species was illustrated. In a concise flora, the emphasis must be on saving space, however the inclusion of such information would be of greater value than for instance, the inclusion of cited specimens.

While an index is included, it is only to families and genera. The extension of the index to include species and also common names (which are included in the text) would have made the work that much more valuable.

Distribution is given for each species — for native Singaporean species distribution is listed by area within Singapore itself, however distribution outside of Singapore is not given. It would also have been useful to include a map with at least some of the Singaporean areas marked. The distribution of introduced species is given in brief, and may at times be incomplete e.g. *Melia azedarach* is listed as being native to Northern India, whereas its true range extends to Northern Australia.

The text is well presented even though some mistakes were obvious e.g. the use of a comma instead of a fullstop after a generic abbreviation, and the consistent misspelling of *Datura metel* (misspelt *D. metal*). An unnecessary abbreviation throughout is the shortening of the generic name to a few letters, rather the usual single letter.

Overall this is a very worthwhile addition to the Flora treatments of the region, in particular as it incorporates naturalized and cultivated species as well as those native. Many native species have disappeared from the island due to increasing population and development pressures, to the point where the introduced species are a major component of the current flora. The books value lies in its conciseness and the number of illustrations included. It should be of considerable use both to those working directly with the islands flora and to those dealing with plants of the region from a more general viewpoint.

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**A Key to Australian Grasses.** Simon, B.K. (1990). pp. 150. (Queensland Department of Primary Industry: Brisbane). Softbound. \$A39.00, incl. postage.

"This book contains the first complete set of keys for the identification of Australian grasses since the 1878 Flora of Australia".

To prepare keys to 1319 grasses is a daunting job. Simon has attempted this by presenting a key to genera which are then arranged alphabetically and under each genus is a key to the species. Critical, but not exhaustive, references are provided under each genus as well as an indication of the States from which the species has been recorded.

The author writes of a "continually updated computerised database of taxonomic and distributional information" but it is not stated explicitly whether the keys were generated by the computer or derived 'by hand' from the database.

Simon has presented an austere set of keys with minimal and one hopes effective leads. Since the sole objective of the keys is to reach a name without error I cannot see why useful additional characters or comment could not be added in many cases, after all there is space in almost every lead. It was disconcerting to be side tracked at the very first lead: "Culms woody" does not lead to *Arundo*! If it is not convenient to key it out there why not state 'see also *Arundo* or similar', there is plenty of space. In general Simon does provide measurements with many of his lead characters and relatively few are subjective e.g. "Leaves very fine" v. "Leaves coarse". Despite these relatively minor short comings it should be useful especially in those States still without regional floras.

The impetus given to both plant collecting and taxonomic work in Australia by the Flora of Australia has resulted in a great many additions to our flora. Simon is to be commended for his efforts to keep us updated with his "Checklist of Australian Grasses" and now a key to help us find our way amongst them.

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