

JOURNAL of the ADELAIDE BOTANIC GARDENS

AN OPEN ACCESS JOURNAL FOR AUSTRALIAN SYSTEMATIC BOTANY

flora.sa.gov.au/jabg

Published by the

STATE HERBARIUM OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

on behalf of the

BOARD OF THE BOTANIC GARDENS AND STATE HERBARIUM

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BOOK REVIEW

CSIRO Handbook of Australian Weeds. M. Lazarides, K. Cowley & P. Hohnen (1997) pp 264. (CSIRO Publishing: Collingwood.) Softbound \$A49.95.

This book will be an essential reference to plant names for Australian weed scientists. It comprises an alphabetical list of 2,733 species and infraspecific taxa of vascular plants, with brief notes on their life form and uses, and cross-indexed by families and common names. Their distribution in Australia is shown by a thumbnail map on which the States from which the taxon is recorded are shaded, and overseas distribution is briefly noted.

There is a bibliography with 244 entries, and each listed taxon is cross-referenced to at least one, and often many, of these source publications. The book is thus an entry point to the literature for each listed plant.

Less useful are the "343 references from misapplied or invalid names to valid ones". Misapplied names, a major stumbling block to the study of introduced flora, are here clearly indicated as such. But the authors' concept of invalid names includes synonyms of various kinds, and the limited space has not allowed any discussion of names treated in synonymy. For instance, no reason is given for choosing *Cuscuta campestris* Yuncker, over the validly published taxonomic synonym *Cuscuta pentagona* Engelm., as preferred name for golden dodder.

This publication derives from Lazarides and Hince's CSIRO Handbook of Economic Plants of Australia. Where relevant, criticisms of that volume have been addressed in the preparation of this new publication. But it necessitated searching a large volume of literature, and an impression lingers that this was sometimes done uncritically. For example, all Flora of Australia treatments are still attributed to "George, A.S. (ed)" instead of to their respective authors.

The Introduction acknowledges the difficulty of defining the term 'weed'. This simple English word denotes a value judgement, not an existential category of plants. The authors have advisedly given the term its broadest possible meaning, including both rare garden escapes (e.g. *Moraea aristata*) and native plants that persist on cleared land (*Haloragis* and *Lomandra*) or have extended their range due to human influence (*Pterostylis dilatata*). One consequence is that native *Cycas* species, even the vulnerable local endemic *C. kennedyana*, are listed as weeds because the whole genus is proclaimed noxious in Queensland.

The choice of species included on such a list will almost inevitably be controversial. Anyone with an interest in native or introduced plant will find it worth their while to browse this publication, if only for the chance of gaining a new viewpoint on some familiar species.

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