

flawed. In this, however, he was not dogmatic and relished the idea of changing and perfecting it in the light of new knowledge. He could evidently be overbearing, but this is an almost inevitable concomitant of such phenomenal energy and talents. It led, however, to unpleasant fallings-out with contemporary journalists and with his one-time mentor Robert Brown, with whom he had started his career in Banks' library in 1819. There was a price to be paid for this energy in terms of health, and the great man seems to have 'burnt out' at what was, for a botanist, a comparatively early age. It is also sad that he seems constantly to have been in a precarious financial state.

One of the greatest attractions of the book is the large number of beautifully reproduced colour plates, mainly of orchids, and mostly by Miss Drake. More has now come to light about this previously enigmatic artist. These include her Christian names, though she was affectionately known as Ducky when she lived with the Lindley family while drawing for the *Botanical Register* which Lindley edited. On the subject of botanical illustration it should be noted that Lindley himself was a fine artist and, in the account of his descendants, it could have been added that some of these artistic genes passed to his great great grandson Rory McEwen.

The Antique Collectors' Club is to be congratulated on continuing its series of collaborative botanical publications in lavishly illustrated volumes at affordable prices.

H. J. NOLTIE

---

**Psilocybin Mushrooms of the World: an identification guide.** Paul Stamets. Berkeley, California: Ten Speed Press. 1996. 245pp. ISBN 0 89815 839 7. \$24.95 (paperback).

For those who have met him, Paul Stamets comes across as an interested and enthusiastic mycologist. He has previously written two books on mushroom cultivation and one on *Psilocybe* mushrooms and their allies, and currently runs a large mushroom-related business. This work is a distillation of a twenty-year love affair with psilocybin-containing mushrooms.

The main part of the book is an identification guide. Prior to this there is an introduction to many aspects of this group of fungi. For those unfamiliar with fungi the psilocybin-containing mushrooms are hallucinogenic fungi, the most well-known example being the magic mushroom. At several points suitable warnings about the danger of picking and eating mushrooms are given, including a description of a poisoning from the death cap. Having said that, this book is quite clear in its aim – people do eat hallucinogenic mushrooms, so surely it makes sense to show them how to safely identify what they are going to eat.

The first few pages of the book are taken up with a rather cursory look at the history of the usage of hallucinogenic fungi. Included are various descriptions of the

---

effects of taking some of these mushrooms, including one where Stamets was apparently able to foresee the future. This is followed by small sections on ecology and distribution, classic habitats, the dangers of mistaken identification, good tips for great trips (including the admission that Stamets still regularly partakes 'to keep his hand in'), field collection techniques and how to identify psilocybin-containing mushrooms. This latter section culminates in a small key and a distribution map that is worse than useless, because it is too small and the distribution dots are too large. From this it appears that the only part of the British Isles with psilocybin-containing mushrooms is centred at Bristol and the rest of the country is barren.

The book is illustrated with several false colour illustrations, some photographs and some electron micrographs. It is never stated but some of these are presumably there to give some indication of the effect that consumption of some of these species can give.

After these initial, superficial parts are the species descriptions themselves. The fungi are divided into two categories, major and minor psilocybin-containing genera. The key preceding these descriptions directs one to the appropriate genus, but once there a simple case of flicking through the pictures and descriptions has to be undertaken, as there is no key to species. Species covered are given both macroscopic and microscopic descriptions along with ecological data and various comments. After the section on the psilocybin-containing mushrooms there is a small part on poisonous lookalikes. It would have been preferable if the poisonous possibilities had received more attention during the main part of the book, but this would have led to repetition and in some cases a broad range of possible identifications. This is not necessarily a bad thing; with a subject such as this one cannot be too cautious. The final section of the book comprises an illustrated glossary, suggested reading list, references and a list of addresses for further information.

There is no discussion of the legal aspects of these mushrooms, other than in anecdotal passing. This would be difficult as the book is trying to cover a worldwide distribution. It should be borne in mind that in some areas simple possession is illegal, in other areas preparation of any sort (including drying) is required to fall foul of the law.

This is an interesting book that would have benefited from some of the illustrations being larger and more emphasis on poisonous species when describing the hallucinogenic ones. The author's enthusiasm shines out throughout, as do his hippie roots!

G. RUTTER