
BOOK REVIEW

Sea Beans and Nickar Nuts. BSBI Handbook No. 10. E. Charles Nelson. 2000.
London: Botanical Society of the British Isles. 156pp. ISBN 0 90 1158 29 1.
£13.95 (softback).
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This delightful little book is an indispensable addition to any self-respecting beach-comber's bookshelf. It is a comprehensive guide to all the seeds which drift onto our shores from tropical regions. It gives hints on how to find them: go to west coast beaches after a south-westerly gale and look for nurdles (small pieces of plastic, the same size as nickar nuts), then look carefully amongst them. Sea beans (*Entada gigas*: *Leguminosae*) and nickar nuts (*Caesalpinia bonduc*, also a legume) may not be very colourful but they are surprisingly common if you look hard enough, and the romance of finding something that might sprout into a tropical tree is hard to resist. Not surprisingly there is a long tradition associated with them and they were thought to bring luck to the finder. They also helped to formulate early ideas on the movement of sea currents and confirmed that long-distance dispersal can occur, sometimes in surprising directions.

All the seeds or fruits of tropical species which have been found around our coasts are covered in this book, and most are illustrated by beautiful ink drawings by Wendy Walsh and Alma Hathaway. Most species that land on our shores would not survive if they managed to germinate, but notes are given on how to attempt to grow them and how long they can survive in the sea. A key is also given so it should be possible to identify your drift seed fairly easily if you should be lucky enough to find one. If you haven't, it is still worth dipping into this book for inspiration to go to a suitable beach, and look a little harder.

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