

1998). In Singapore he pioneered the use of trained monkeys to collect specimens from the forest canopy (Corner, 1992), crossing borders with his caged macaques and remaining active even under house arrest during the Japanese occupation. Corner was once likened to that spiny and seemingly impenetrable fruit the durian, once properly opened revealing most improbable tastes. His insights into floral evolution and the ancestry of angiosperms (Corner, 1949) might be thought of in the same way. Peter Ashton remembers with humour Corner's tale of travelling to Europe in search of a type specimen only to discover the dried remains of a cheese sandwich in the crucial packet where figs were supposed to be found. Readers who have waited all these years for Corner's last word on *Ficus* may be similarly befuddled.

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Woody Plants of Western African Forests. W. D. Hawthorne & C. C. H. Jongkind, illustrated by R. Wise & M. Spitteler. Kew Publishing. 2006. 1040 pp. ISBN 978 1 84246 089 4. £69 (hardback).

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This monumental work by Hawthorne and Jongkind is amazing in its breadth and depth. It covers all the woody forest plants occurring from Senegal to Ghana. This accounts for 2200 species. What is even more remarkable is that in contrast to most taxonomic publications, species level identifications can be made without flowers and fruit using a combination of a leafy shoot and field characters, such as smell and the colour of the slash.

The book is very well illustrated with a combination of excellent line drawings and colour photographs. It was fascinating on a recent fieldtrip to watch an ecologist pick up this book, look at the photographs and say 'this is my kind of book'. What was even more informative was watching a taxonomist carefully read pages of the species keys and come to the same conclusion.

I have not yet had the chance to use this book within the countries which it covers. However, when I first started using this book in Congo some 1500 km outside its geographical range, I had a strange feeling. The last time I had that feeling was when I first used Al Gentry's *A Field Guide to the Families and Genera of Woody Plants of Northwest South America* in Belize. It wasn't the similar slightly clumsy title, nor was it the fact that it worked so well so far outside the prescribed area. It was as if, on examining a plant, I had a very good taxonomist beside me helping with the identification process. This book is different from the one Al Gentry wrote. In many ways it is a better one: it has more illustrations and it aims for species level identification. However, what both books have done is upped the ante for tropical plant identification, and upped it by an order of magnitude.

In my opinion there are two reasons that this book is so good. The first is the quantity and the quality of taxonomy that went into writing it. What other field guide do you know which publishes a list of new combinations (p. 995)? Even more unusual the authors provide a list of names which they consider 'not to be synonyms' (p. 996). I had to think about the implications of that one. This is not just a synthesis of existing knowledge but a significant new body of taxonomic information produced by two authors close to the peak of their taxonomic productivity. In addition there is a great expansion of the use of non-fertile characters from that which existed in previous literature.

The second reason is the quality of the illustrations. Not just the line drawings done so well and in such quantity by Rosemary Wise and Marjolein Spitteler, not just the colour photographs, but also the judicious use of already published illustrations. For example, in Congo I saw the ecologist I mentioned earlier identify *Trichilia martineaui* (p. 733) from the drawing with only a seed. At the time this species was not known from Congo and I doubted the identification. However, looking at the drawing and the seed I agreed and at the same time realized from the leaf drawing that this was one of the unidentified specimens I had previously collected in the same area.

The authors have obviously thought about how people will use this book, and discuss the 'analytical approach' vs. the 'browsing approach'. This discussion is excellent and should be expanded elsewhere. I would want to include the 'checking approach', by which I mean: 'I have a plant, I have a species name or two and I want to see whether the description and the picture fit'.

There are some gems of dry wit in this book, for example the two-page table titled 'Landmarks in the spectrum of stipules in the Rubiaceae'. How apt: landmarks in a sea of stipules. Anybody who has looked desperately at the stipule of a sterile *Rub* is going to smile at how the only real character which tells you it is a *Rub* is sometimes the only clue to the genus as well.

Interestingly, the major sections in this book tend to be orders. For me this is a fascinating approach: to see *Malpighiales* as the 'entry point' when faced with an unknown forest shrub. I use this myself for some of the big, well-defined tropical orders such as *Sapindales*, *Lamiales*, *Gentiales*, *Malvales*, *Malpighiales* and *Myrtales*, but this is the first time I have seen it in a field guide.

The rationale for the order of families is presented very clearly on page 10. However, using the groups rather than formal taxa to arrange plants means that genera of *Euphorbiaceae* are split into two different sections. In the second paragraph of the introduction the authors suggest that using this book with plants is a good way to learn tropical botany. This is certainly true. I have already learnt a lot from this book in the few months I have had it. However, I would argue that the authors probably underestimate how important this book is going to be for the next generation of botanists working in the region. I consider this book to be much more than a field guide and I think this will be the main reference in west Africa for many years to come. For that reason alone, I would argue that the genera of *Euphorbiaceae* should be placed together and the families placed within orders. I think it is fine to place *Dioncophyllaceae* (*Caryophyllales*) with *Combretaceae* (*Myrtales*) together in a field guide, but I wonder about placing those families under the heading ‘Malpighiales 2 (glandular)’ when they actually belong in *Caryophyllales* and *Myrtales*.

The book has been very well put together and the proof reading and indexing must have been an enormous task. There are still inconsistencies which could have been removed. For example, group 16b is called ‘*Strephonema* gp.’ in the key on page 124 and ‘*Napoleonaeae-Scytopetalum*’ on page 196. These are minor inconsistencies but they did slow down my understanding of the groups when I was trying to identify specimens.

My only real complaint is that there are no families in the index of scientific names. If I have a plant in front of me and I know the genus the fastest way to find it is to go to the index and find a page number. If I only know the family, I have to go to another index and there I am given a group number, not a page number. These group numbers are an integral part of the book, and very useful, but they are not the fastest way to find a family you want to check. That is what page numbers are for.

But such concerns are minor and petty. What is important is that this is a fantastic contribution to botany and a pleasure to use. I doubt I will ever review a better book on plants.

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Flowering Plant Families of the World (2nd edition). V. H. Heywood, R. K. Brummitt, A. Culham & O. Sedberg. Kew Publishing. 2007. 424 pp, over 1000 colour and sepia illustrations. ISBN 978 1 84246 165 5. £27.95 (hardback).
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Larger in size and content than the first edition, this attractive book will have wide appeal not only to those interested in plant systematics but also to those interested in gardening and natural history and plants in general. Its appeal lies in its worldwide approach, attractive illustrations and authoritative and lucid text, and – new for this edition – the evaluation of new family concepts. As Heywood notes in the introduction, ‘our knowledge of plants has been dramatically changed as a result of a flood of publications on morphology, anatomy, distribution and molecular phylogeny’. This is