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An Introduction to the Trees from the North of the Republic of Congo. David Harris, Jean-Marie Moutsamboté, Emile Kami, Jacques Florence, Samuel Bridgewater & Alexandra Wortley. Edinburgh: Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh. 2011. 208 pp., 93 colour plates. ISBN 978 1 906129 80 4. £20.

doi:10.1017/S0960428612000182

This book reaches out to non-botanists and tries to make them enthusiastic about a group of plants that do not have a high ‘panda-index’ – trees – and even then, not from a large region, but from a very specific area: the northern part of the Republic of Congo. Not many people go there, at least not many tourists, apart from those seeking remote rain forests with lots of elephants and lowland gorillas. But the introduction states this publication is also meant for students, foresters, ecologists and zoologists, so also those with a professional interest in trees.

The book deals with 93 species, carefully selected, and leaves out the most common ones such as the *parasolier*. After a brief introduction covering how to use the book, some ecological information, how the book was put together and some peculiarities of the region, each species is treated with one page of text. This gives its most characteristic features and a brief statement on its ecology, distribution and sometimes uses. On the opposite page is a colour plate with 4–8 photographs showing leaves, flowers and fruits, often with helpful details that will aid proper identification. Slash characters are generally depicted as well. Remarkable is the fact that fruits nearly always show up, but flowers are regularly lacking – probably because they are rarer to observe, and so also more difficult to catch on camera. All photographs are, without exception, of high to very high quality, and informative. It is clear that they were taken by a taxonomist (David Harris in the majority of cases) with a good knowledge about the characteristic features of the species.

The fact that the book was composed by taxonomists has also perhaps led to some weaknesses. For example, the sequence in which the species are treated is that of APG III, whereas for non-botanists a much more practical solution would have been

to group the species by leaf shape (simple, compound, dentate/smooth margin, etc.), presence of latex, etc. The book does have a small glossary at the back, but not all the terms used are explained here, and no identification tool is present other than the (admittedly very attractive) photographs. In my opinion this is a handicap for the target group of users. The book does however explain why no key was included: the authors refer to the recently published illustrated identification manual for Sangha trees by Harris & Wortley (2008).

Furthermore, I feel that to encourage the target group, and especially a subgroup like tourists, to become enthusiastic about trees more effort could have been put into adding local names and more information on uses. Today, for example through the excellent PROTA website (www.protaafrica.org/en/home), such information could have been added with comparatively little effort. For example, the very first species treated is *Pycnanthus angolensis*. This is called the African nutmeg, or *ilomba* or *faux muscadier* in French, and especially the use of the seeds and fruits is well known. In addition, the wood is valued and the bark has various medicinal properties. In my opinion, including such information would have made this otherwise attractive and worthwhile book much more interesting for the target users. Space would not have been a problem, because most species treatments cover only three-quarters of the page.

Notwithstanding these remarks, the publication of this book is very welcome, since hardly any such book exists. The information provided is of high quality and the size is sufficiently small to slip easily in a backpack and take to the places where it should be used: the forests of northern Congo. The quality of the paper and the hard cover make it a product that can stand the inevitable beating while being carried in the field. I would like to see more of this type of book, aimed at a broad audience, which would probably also assist in stimulating both tourism and conservation in these remote areas.

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