

**Flora of the Indian Desert.** M. M. Bhandari. First published in 1978, revised edition published in 1990 by MPS Repros, 39 BGKT Extension, New Pali Road, Jodhpur-342001 (India). 600 Rupees (c. £13).

The new edition of the *Flora of the Indian Desert* is a solidly bound volume of 435 pages with 114 coloured plates and 136 black and white line drawings. It presents clear family, generic, and specific keys and concise but detailed species descriptions of 619 species, 70 species more than in the first edition. The lists of localities comprise only specimens examined by the author; the general distribution of each species is given. Type specimens are not indicated.

*The Flora of the Indian Desert* covers the most arid region of India. The Indian desert occupies the north-western part of Rajasthan State between 25°02' to 28°10'N and 69°30' to 74°E at an average altitude of approximately 100 meters. Most of the area consists of dry, undulating plains of hardened sand. The remaining region is largely a rolling plain of loose sand forming dunes of 2 to 10km in length and 30 to 80m in height. The few rivers are small and seasonal. A very large part of the population leads a nomadic or semi-nomadic life, their chief wealth consists of live-stock. Woody plants are used as fuel far beyond their natural reparative power. The degree of overgrazing is summarized by a local proverb: "Camels will eat everything except *Calotropis* but the goat will devour even that, leaving only the pebbles." Large saline tracts are spread throughout the desert. The number of halophilous and psammophilous Chenopodiaceae is remarkably low: *Haloxylon* 2 species, *Salsola* 1 species, *Suaeda* 2 species. Poaceae with 111 species, followed by Fabaceae 61 species, Asteraceae 36 species and Cyperaceae 36 species are the largest families. Convolvulaceae with 32 species and Malvaceae 27 species are comparatively well represented.

Phytogeographically the importance of the Flora of the Indian Desert is the fact that it deals with the easternmost extension of the great Sahara-Sindian desert belt which begins in the west with the eastern Canary Island of Fuerteventura and Lanzarote crossing the whole of North Africa and Arabia and the South of Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Bhandari p. 21 summarizes the phytogeography of the Indian Desert. Leaving aside cosmopolitan and tropical connections the "Western"\* connections are preponderant as company to the "Eastern" connections (34.2%) which could be interpreted of the Indian desert as the easternmost extension of the Indian Saharo-Sindian desert belt – pending careful analysis and comparison of the individual areas of all the species concerned.

The book can be recommended to anybody interested in the flora of the Indian subcontinent as well as to students of desert floras in general – last but not least – the Floras of Pakistan, Arabia and the Flora Iranica area.

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\* from the Indian standpoint