

BOOK REVIEW

Roses of Great Britain and Ireland: B.S.B.I. Handbook no. 7. G. G. Graham and A. L. Primavesi; illustrated by Margaret Gold; distribution maps prepared by the Biological Records Centre, Institute of Terrestrial Ecology. London: Botanical Society of the British Isles, 1993. 208pp. ISBN 0 901158 22 4. £11.50 (paperback).

The genus *Rosa* has, for a very long time, been the despair of botanists of all ilks and nationalities. Most treatments of British material (notably Wolley Dod's accounts of 1911 and 1930–31) included a mass of varieties and forms which proved virtually unworkable in the field, so that little progress was made in the study of roses between 1930 and 1975. As late as 1978 McCallum Webster's *Flora of Moray, Nairn and East Inverness* had no fewer than 87 taxa, many of them varieties, and including several 'vars. nov.'. The breakthrough came when Dr R. Melville, then the foremost British rhodologist, accepted that the taxonomic problems were largely the result of extensive hybridization. The publication of his revised views in Stace's *Hybridization and the Flora of the British Isles* in 1975 proved the stimulus needed for Gordon Graham and Tony Primavesi to get to grips with the genus, resulting in this first-class aid to identification.

This octavo volume first reviews the historical background and the problems presented by the roses' reproductive peculiarities, before going on to discuss their morphology. This chapter gets down to basics: habit, prickles, leaves, glands, flowers, sepals and hips, each part illustrated by helpful drawings. Next are accounts of ecology and distribution, and these are followed by hints on collecting and pressing. Keys precede the largest section which comprises descriptions (with figures) covering 12 native and 8 introduced species, along with as many as 83 hybrids, albeit some being described very briefly. The vice-county distributions of these hybrids are given; distribution of hybrids involving the same parents but where the maternal and paternal parent have not been determined ('non-directional records') are noted separately. Thirty-two dot maps follow: only reliably identified taxa are mapped, which means that some appear very sparse, while others effectively record the distribution of contributing experts. As the caninoid roses cause most problems, a sensible approach has been taken with *Rosa canina* itself: it has been divided into four informal groups, which are mapped separately. A map of *R. canina* s.l. might usefully have been included to give a better picture of its overall distribution, especially in Scotland. A useful glossary defining terms used by the authors, a bibliography and an index complete the book.

This is a worthy companion to the previous six B.S.B.I. Handbooks. It contains much commonsense and advice, not least in pointing out that if botanists are prepared to get to know their local native species (never very many: in Scotland usually only five or six), they will then be able to decide, with a little experience, which hybrids are likely to occur and to recognize them. However, as with *Rubus*, it has to be realized that not a few bushes will defy identification, which does not mean there is any need to treat them as 'vars. nov.'. The bane of putting up with practically meaningless varietal names and forms is over: roses in future promise no longer to be the proverbial (if still perhaps literal) thorn in the flesh.

G. H. Ballantyne