
many disciplines. It should be found on the shelves of anyone interested in environmental change, not just mycologists.

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A Guide to Species Irises: Their Identification and Cultivation. Edited by The Species Group of the British Iris Society. Cambridge University Press. 1997. xv + 371pp, 27 maps, 27 line drawings, 128 colour photographs. ISBN 0 521 44074 2. Price £65.00 (US\$105.00) (hardback).

The genus *Iris* has a vast number of devotees if the number of societies is any guide: there are many iris societies throughout the temperate regions of the world. The genus is justly popular, for it contains species which cover a wide range of plant size and flower shape and which will grow in a huge range of habitats from marshy to desertic and from subarctic to subtropical. Think of a colour: you can find an iris with flowers of that colour. Think of a season: you can find an iris which is in flower at that time.

Since W. R. Dykes' classic monograph *The genus Iris* was published in 1913 there have been changes in the classification of the genus and some new species have been discovered. Modifications to the classification occurred in papers by Diels (1930), Lawrence (1953) and Rodionenko (1961), and Mathew in *The Iris* (1981, 1989) brought together much of this information. Members of the British Iris Society's Species Group decided to assemble and summarize the material from these and other (often scattered or inaccessible) publications and to present it in book form and this book is the result. In addition to the information covered in the literature, the book gathers the knowledge and experience of many iris-growers and is a most valuable compilation. It includes all the species that have been described to date, and considers the changes in classification that have occurred.

The bulk of the book deals with the species (over 260): these are presented alphabetically in the subgenera, sections and series of the genus that are generally accepted at present. For each species there is a description (including the chromosome number where known) as well as data on geographical distribution, habitat, flowering time, and cultivation. Intraspecific taxa, where present, are similarly treated. Only one identification key is provided (to series *Sibericae*) and this is one of the failings of this book whose title includes the word 'identification'. Occasionally, as in section *Oncocyclus* and series *Californicae*, there is a synopsis which helps to narrow a plant down to a group of species, although in the case of the former it is necessary to know the country of origin of the plant in question. In subgenus *Scorpiris* for example, which contains 59 species, it is a mammoth task to wade through all the descriptions in an attempt to find a name. Similarly, in section *Iris* with 38 species, one is left to flounder. Would it have been so difficult to have provided keys?

Beginners are notoriously frightened by keys, but, as stated in the Preface, this is not a beginner's book.

In addition to the main section on the species, there are chapters on 'The Iris in History' by Charles Lyte, 'Cultivation and the Great Genus' by Peter Maynard and 'Chromosomes and the Genus *Iris*' by J. R. Ellis, all of which add interesting and useful facts. A section with the curious title 'Identification Guide for Plants as Received' provides information that will help to identify a plant (at least to its section or series) using only root and vegetative characters.

The line drawings by Christabel King are extremely useful, showing habit, flower parts, capsule and seed, although it is a pity they are relegated to the end of the book, as are the photographs (presumably because this is a cheaper way to publish). The photographs, mostly of less commonly grown species, are generally informative and helpful. Unfortunately, neither drawings nor photographs are referred to in either the text or the index, and the illustrations are not cross-referenced to the text. This is a pity, as a little more forethought would have made the book easier to use.

There are certain other things which are irritating about this book. For example, habitat is sometimes put under its own heading as in series *Syriacae* and subgenus *Scorpiris*, or included with the data under 'Distribution', 'Cultivation' or even 'Observations'. Flowering time is generally given under the description, but sometimes appears in 'Observations' and is sometimes curiously absent, even when the species in question is in cultivation. There is little consistency about the way in which geographical distribution is presented and erratic punctuation too often causes confusion. Distributions such as 'area north-east of Erzerum, Tortum' or 'Kara Kum and Kyzyl Kum deserts' assume a geographical knowledge possessed by relatively few: the inclusion of a country would be useful. Some out-of-date names such as Formosa, Persia, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia have crept in and there is even the occasional use of Cilicia and Galatia (Roman provinces of Turkey) which will only be found in an historical Atlas! Central Asia appears also as Soviet Central Asia and Russian Central Asia. Gruzia is the Russian name for Georgia and not a different place, and Georgia's capital is Tbilisi (or Tiflis) but not Tibilis.

There are also inconsistencies in the contractions of authority names, but more seriously, there are too many misapplications of authorities to taxa at various ranks, or even no authorities. For example, subgenus *Nepalensis* (Dykes) should be subgenus *Nepalensis* (Dykes) Lawrence; var. *pseudocyperus* Schur. of *I. graminea* L. should be var. *pseudocyperus* (Schur.) Beck; subsp. *maritima* Lamarck of *I. spuria* L. should be subsp. *maritima* (Lamarck) Fournier; subsp. *elegantissima* (no authority) of *I. iberica* Hoffm. should be subsp. *elegantissima* (Sosn.) Fed. & Takht.; var. *battandieri*, var. *lusitanica*, var. *taitii* and var. *praecox* (all of *I. xiphium*) are given without authorities – the last-mentioned variety was described by Dykes, but the others are invalid new combinations; *I. urumovii* Vel., a species previously considered to be synonymous with *I. sintenisii* Janka (not *I. sintenesii* as in the text), is here made a variety of the latter – but by whom? No authority is cited and therefore the combination is invalid. And why has *I. foetidissima* L. become *I. foetidissima* (Diels)

Mathew? If such an odd change really has occurred, there should be an explanation! Other questions spring to mind such as where are *I. hexagona* Walter var. *savannarum* Small and *I. lorea* Janka? How can the accepted species *I. pumila* L. also be a synonym of both *I. attica* and *I. furcata*? There should have been much more careful checking.

Most of these criticisms might be considered to be nit-picking, at least by non-taxonomists, and are aimed mainly at the editing. They should not diminish the fact that the book is a mine of information and should be bought by anyone with more than a passing interest in the genus. As previously mentioned, this is not a book for beginners: it is aimed at informed gardeners, botanists and professional horticulturists and as such, despite its shortcomings, it is successful.

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