

to be subsequently modified. For example, *Asclepiadaceae* narrowly misses being in this volume on alphabetical grounds despite its close relationship with *Apocynaceae* and the debate over boundaries between the two families. Such incongruities are dependent on the classification adopted by contributing authors and make the arrangement of this Flora biologically arbitrary.

It is inevitable, given the diversity that occurs in the Flora area, that multiple volumes are required but the format could have been adjusted so that more taxa could be accommodated in each volume. In particular the illustrations could have been better organized: in this volume many of the illustrations are scattered throughout the text and it may have been a more efficient use of space and easier to refer to them if they had all been separated onto plates (although this would require some reduction in size, and therefore clarity, of the illustrations). By eliminating detailed descriptions of species the volume of the Flora has been somewhat restricted but it is still a weighty tome at just under two kilograms, and much more shelf space is needed before all the flowering plant families will be covered.

Despite these criticisms the Flora is an ambitious attempt to produce an inventory and identification guide at the species level to an extensive region of South America and is much needed. It is the first attempt to cover such a large area in northern South America and it must be applauded for this. It is clearly laid out and pragmatic in its approach to species descriptions, and one hopes that subsequent volumes will follow rapidly so that an important and botanically fascinating area will be documented in an invaluable and pioneering Flora.

R. ATKINSON

Common Families of Flowering Plants. Michael Hickey & Clive King. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1997. 212pp. ISBN 0 521 57281 9. £40 (hardback). ISBN 0 521 57609 1. £14.95 (paperback).

Fifteen years ago when studying flowering plant families in an undergraduate classification course, 'Hickey and King' (*100 Families of Flowering Plants*, ed. 1) was our bible. No other modern textbook offered the same range of diagrams and discussion of floral morphology in a form suitable for students. A welcomed second edition appeared in 1988, which I used as a reference when running my own courses in flowering plant classification. When I was beginning a course this spring, *Common Families of Flowering Plants* arrived on my desk for review. So I have put it to the test in the classroom, as well as comparing this 'cut-down' version with the full 'Hickey and King'.

Common Families of Flowering Plants covers 25 of the more common (temperate) families, in a larger (A4) format than its elder brother. It is designed to give an introduction to characteristics of plant families, and so be of use to botany students and others wanting a knowledge of flower structure, such as botanical artists and

ecologists. The introductory chapters are much expanded, with fully labelled illustrations and good explanations of systematic groups, classifications and general botany. The main bulk of the book contains much the same information as the original work: family by family accounts of detailed description, classification, distribution, general features and economic importance, supplemented by numerous line drawings. Some of the original artwork has been redrawn (*Lamium album*, *Malva sylvestris* and *Symphytum officinale*), and a few new species have been included (*Ajuga reptans*, *Cyclamen persicum*, *Helleborus foetidus* and *Silene dioica*). The choice of a bright white background has increased the clarity of the line drawings compared with the off-white original, but I feel that several other of the 'heavier' drawings should also have been redrawn: *Antirrhinum majus*, *Arum maculatum*, *Iris pseudacorus*, *Salix caprea* and *Vicia faba* are particularly poor. The variation in quality and style of illustrations through the book is quite marked. Additional plates of flowers of genera in the *Labiatae*, *Scrophulariaceae* and *Orchidaceae* supplement these family accounts and help to cover some of the information lost. I have always considered that a major flaw with the earlier editions is the inadequate labelling of line drawings. Unfortunately this version also suffers from this. There are numerous good to excellent drawings and diagrams, but only a very few have the clear labelling that one would wish students to provide in their own work. More often than not the numbered illustrations appear on one page, with a facing page bearing the details in legends. It is left to the reader to interpret the parts illustrated, and from my experience students often get this wrong, particularly when starting out.

Classroom practicals have shown that students liked using the book, and that it gives a good coverage of the families (as most courses rely on readily available plant material the removal of many of the tropical families does not really matter). The authors have succeeded in their goal to produce a low-cost, general textbook, aimed as a basic introduction to the botany of flowering plants. I am sure it will find its way onto the bookshelves of many botany students in the years to come. Having said this I would like to stress that although the scope of this book is fine for temperate groups, it is severely limited for the tropics. There is still a pressing need for basic botanical research on tropical families, and the training of tropical botanists needs textbooks like the full *100 Families of Flowering Plants*. I hope that the plea for a third edition of '*100 Families*' which Max Walters makes in his foreword to this current version will be heeded by the publishers.

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The Identification of Flowering Plant Families. 4th edition. James Cullen.
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1997. xii + 215pp. ISBN 0 521 58550 3.
£12.95 (paperback).

This book, which was first published in 1965, aimed to give a tool for flowering