

wrote: 'At last we ran into the valley of the coco de mer: a valley as big as old Hastings, quite filled with the huge straight stems and golden shiny stars of the giant palm: it seemed almost too good to be true that I had really reached it' (North, 1980). The same sense of artist's wonder infuses Rosemary Wise's book: 'In July 1985, from the window seat of a plane, I watched the sun rise over the Indian Ocean and, as the light became more intense, saw a collection of emerald green, mountainous islands, seemingly floating on the turquoise sea, a magical sight that will stay in my memory for ever'.

A Fragile Eden is a comprehensive survey of the endemic flora with botanically accurate illustrations painted from life, which will attract deserved attention to this endangered and curious flora. It invites comparison with others of the genre such as *Hawaiian Florilegium* (Grierson & Green, 1996), which carries the hope that 'this book, with its beautiful images and descriptions of some very special tropical plants, will help preserve Hawaii's unique botanical heritage for the benefit and enjoyment of future generations'. Rosemary Wise's book also openly carries conservation hopes. Such books form an important part of the island plant conservation effort and should ideally be produced for all islands with endangered endemic floras. Princeton University Press (and the six patrons who contributed to publication costs) are to be congratulated in having the conviction to publish this book with its high production values, where lesser publishers quailed.

Many such books result from the collaboration between an artist and a botanist (such as the Green & Grierson duo). Rosemary Wise is both, and her text is readable and authoritative, with her own field observations. The resulting unity of plate and text sets the book apart from others. This is a magnificent work, as noble in its execution as it is in its purpose.

References

- GRIERSON, M. & GREEN, P. S. (1996). *A Hawaiian Florilegium: botanical portraits from paradise*. Honolulu, Hawaii: National Tropical Botanical Garden, Lawai and University of Hawaii, Honolulu.
- NORTH, M. (1980). *A Vision of Eden: the life and work of Marianne North*. Richmond: Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew; London: Webb & Bower.

Q. C. B. CRONK

The Biodiversity of African Plants: Proceedings of XIVth AETFAT Congress.

Edited by L. J. G. van der Maesen, X. M. van der Berg, J. M. van Medenbach de Rooy. Dordrecht, Boston, London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1996. xv + 861pp. ISBN 0792340957. £225 (US\$ 335, Dfl 500.00; hardback).

The title *Biodiversity of African Plants* is almost a case of false labelling of goods. Anybody looking for information on diversity indices, rapid assessment techniques,

inventory methods and indicator species will only find these issues dealt with in a rigorous manner in a nine-page paper by Beentje. The remainder of this 861-page volume touches on almost every imaginable field of study concerning African plants. The breadth of subjects treated suggests a more appropriate title of *The Diversity of African Botany*. This diversity is both the strength and weakness of these proceedings. So much information means that everybody will need to have access to this wonderful book. Do you need advice on using computers in an African herbarium? Then you should read Pearce *et al.*'s *Computerisation of the East African Herbarium*, and at the bottom of p.29 visualize the initial problems of people entering data on laptops in poor light, sitting on uncomfortable chairs at crowded benches, and plan your work differently. Or, are you an enthusiastic young ethnobotanist who believes that local cures are wonderful and you do not see the point in Latin names and accurate species identification? Then you should read Abbiw's paper on the mistaken use of *Erythrophleum suaveolens* ('poisonous to man and beast') instead of *Khaya senegalensis* ('febrifuge and virility tonic'). Perhaps you've heard about cladistics and are thinking of trying it in your next revision? Then you should familiarize yourself with monophyly and paraphyly, championed by Schire & Lewis and Brummitt respectively. If you are concerned about the implications of the Convention on Biodiversity, then you must read Tewode B. G. Egziabher & Friis for a sane and constructive discussion on a topic usually discussed by people with little understanding of plants, research and collaboration. If you need to collect specimens from 50m tall trees then consult Wieringa's contribution: *Tree-climbing on a free rope*. Whatever your taste in African botany you are guaranteed to find something interesting in this book.

The problem with this kind of book is there is so much diversity but not enough focus. It is hard to justify putting this all together in one volume. In addition the price of £225 is far too high. Unlike Verdcourt (1996), I have not considered trying to sell my review copy but he makes a serious point. Think how far that money could go on a field expenses in the bush, or how long it would last working at a herbarium. If your library can afford this book, then get them to buy it, otherwise find somebody else who has a copy and borrow it every time you need to refer to it. Then make a photocopy of the seven pages of Contents to remind yourself what is in this diverse collection. The editors have done a very good job in getting this volume ready within two years of the congress. They did this partly by not sending authors proofs. Sensitive authors should console themselves that the publication is already available, albeit at too high a price. Some of the photographs are very poorly presented, e.g. on p.134, and colour slides are poorly reproduced in black and white (p.56), but in general the editing is excellent and not too obtrusive (although I didn't like those double-line borders around the tables and figures). Another comment is that I do not think new names and combinations should be published in a volume such as this. This is somewhat a matter of taste, but I would argue that for publishing new names there are many more appropriate outlets than this one. The editorial experience necessary for nomenclatural decisions, the review process and the checking

of proofs by authors are all too important to be skipped in a volume like this. I have seen invalidly published 'new combinations' in previous AETFAT (*Association pour l'Etude Taxonomique de la Flore d'Afrique Tropicale*), proceedings which would not have passed a good editor with nomenclatural experience. Another small point is that the exact publication date is not given, as far as I could see. There is 'copyright 1996' on the Reverse of Title Page, and on the first page of every paper. Well and good, but, for priority in nomenclature we might need to know a more precise date of publication. The slip from the publisher which came with my review copy gave the publication date as 20 June 1995 which from the date at the bottom of the Foreword by the editors (March 1996) and the copyright date, I assume is wrong.

The themes of African plants, research and collaboration which run through almost every paper in this volume reflect the aims of AETFAT. Despite its changes in composition through the second half of this century, the organization continues to thrive. The diversity of papers in this symposium are perhaps the best reflection of the widespread support of those aims and the health of the organization. The growing number of contributors with addresses in Africa in each successive AETFAT proceedings also bode well for the future of botany in Africa. In a time when taxonomy is becoming more and more important and yet we taxonomists are continually suffering from a lack of recognition I will end with my favourite quote from this book (Beentje: 108): 'without continuing work in alpha-taxonomy everything else is based on quicksand'.

Reference

VERDCOURT, B. (1996). Book review: *African Safari*. *Biodiversity Letters* 3: 204–205.

D. HARRIS

Exercises in Plant Disease Epidemiology. Edited by Leonard J. Franel and Deborah A. Ncher. 1997. 242pp., 67 line drawings; ISBN 0 89054 224 4. S79 (spiral-bound).

Reviewing an exercise volume like the above is in some respects comparable to reviewing a cook book: only after trying all the recipes can one really assess their impact. It would be impossible to carry out all the exercises in this laboratory manual in a short time span, and this review must therefore be restricted to the more obvious features of the work.

The book is divided into five main topics: 1, measuring pathogen populations and disease; 2, temporal, and 3, spatial aspects of epidemiology; 4, host–parasite dynamics; and 5, yield loss and management. Each of these topics is arranged in a number of chapters (between three and nine), totalling 34. The chapters have been contributed by 29 authors from the international plant pathology community. The book is