

book. Clearly the volume has as one of its fundamental aims an increase in the awareness of threatened plants so that conservation agencies, involved primarily with *in situ* conservation, can focus resources on key species within their geographical areas of responsibility; therefore, the easy compilation of geographically based priority lists is of central importance. As the Red List is structured according to a taxonomic framework and has no index of species occurring in particular geographical areas, the only way to compile an area based list is to go through it page by page. This is not easily done as the list extends to 752 pages of small type.

This aside, the Red List is a work of central importance to all those concerned with threatened plant conservation. Whether you are working at the local, national or international level, this book will help in the setting of priorities in plant conservation, a necessary process because resources for conservation will always be limited. This book is also of relevance to those concerned with managing botanical collections. By increasing the ease with which managers can identify accessions of threatened taxa, increased cooperation between *in situ* and *ex situ* conservation efforts should result. Another important role is to draw attention to the scale of the problem faced by plant conservationists, thereby strengthening the case for increased resources in the future.

Problems have to be quantified before they can be effectively dealt with. Conservationists concerned with threatened plants now have a global information baseline, a significant development which can only improve the prospects of the many plant species currently facing extinction. The Red List is essential reading for the plant conservation community, but even if you are not directly involved with this I recommend that you take the time to search out this remarkable publication in a suitable library.

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A Fragile Eden: portraits of the endemic flowering plants of the granitic Seychelles.

R. Wise. Princeton, Massachusetts: Princeton University Press. 1998. 216pp., incl. 78 full-colour plates. ISBN 0 691 04817 7. £49.50 (hardback).

'The most impressive and memorable feature of the Seychelles flora has to be the palms, for the occurrence of six monospecific genera on landmasses covering less than 300km² in the Indian Ocean immediately brings to mind the processes of isolation and evolution that are so evident on tropical oceanic islands.' So writes Malcolm Coe in his introductory essay entitled *The biogeography of the Seychelles Islands*, which adds value to Rosemary Wise's exceptional work. And the most memorable of these palms is the coco de mer (*Lodoica maldivica*) which is confined to the Vallée de Mai on Praslin. Rosemary Wise is one of our outstanding botanical artists, and her painting of the coco de mer is a characteristic contribution to the iconography of the callipygian coconut. The coco de mer is no stranger to artists. In 1883 Marianne North left England expressly to paint it. On reaching Praslin she

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,