

## REVIEW

PAUL KENRICK & PAUL DAVIS: **Fossil Plants**. Natural History Museum Publishing, London, UK, 2004. 199 pp., illus. ISBN 0-565-09176-X. Price: GBP 16.95 (Natural History Museum's bookshop, Cromwell Road, London SW7 5BD and internet: [www.nhm.ac.uk/shop](http://www.nhm.ac.uk/shop)).

This book is published in the Living Past Series published by the Natural History Museum, London, UK. This series offers authoritative introductions to different aspects of the fossil world, furthering an understanding of the origins of modern plants and animals. The various volumes in the series are written for the interested general public.

The readers are taken on an interesting trip through the evolution of the plant world in various chapters, describing in detail the processes happening in the beginning of plant life within the realm of the algae, and the Devonian explosion and its consequences. Thereafter, a whole chapter is dedicated to the origin of forests, including the different ways in which trees solved the problem of making a trunk; a subject that is almost never treated in palaeobotanical books, and thus a real addition to the literature on fossil plants. The following chapter deals with coal, and especially the Carboniferous flora of the UK is extensively described. It is a pity that, when describing the processes leading to coal formation, no attention is paid to the formation of brown coal, in which many Tertiary fossils have been found. After the coal, another general chapter is included on the 'measuring of the past', a subject that could also have been dealt with at the end of the book, thus not disturbing the tale of the development of plant life through geological time. The end of the Palaeozoic and the Mesozoic plant evolution is relatively concisely described, thus indicating where the real interest of the authors is, namely in the Devonian and in the development of angiosperm plant life. The latter subject is treated comprehensively in the last chapter. Before that, there is another chapter of general interest, on the interactions between plants and animals, but again this chapter might indeed have been placed at the end of the book. The final, short, chapter is called 'Summation' and deals with the purposes of palaeobotany, what this research has done to change our view of the world, and what the present-day challenges may be.

The book is a real addition to palaeobotanical literature for a general public, but has a few disadvantages: first of all, although there is a brief glossary, many words are not explained: which amateur knows what is meant with 'monocarpic', or with a 'pyroclastic flow'. Secondly: although the book is very well illustrated with good photos, there are no scale bars on them. In the figure captions, the size of the figured fossil is usually indicated, but the true size is, in my opinion, thus more difficult to imagine than with a scale bar. And finally, for readers outside the UK, the book focuses very much on the evolution of the plant world in the UK and does not pay much attention to developments elsewhere, except for a short paragraph on Gondwana floras in the chapter on plant life through ages. Despite these few critical remarks that might be remedied in a second edition, I would recommend the book for the knowledgeable general public.

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