

REVIEW

M.M. BHANDARI: Flora of the Indian Desert. 2nd ed. MPS Repros, Jodhpur, 1990, 435 pp., 136 figs., 114 col. photographs. Bound. Price £ 40. ISBN 81-85304-13-0.

This flora covers part of the Great Indian or Thar Desert, viz. the Districts of Jodhpur, Barmer, and Jaisalmer in Rajasthan State, an area of some 25,000 sq. km. It is an inhospitable region mainly of sand dunes at about 100 m above sea level. The indigenous flora of this region includes 619 species of Seedplants (78 families, 315 genera). The flora proper is preceded by a short introduction mainly on the climate, soil, and vegetation. The flora gives keys to the families, genera, and species. The names of the families are given without any citation; of the genera only the nomenclaturally relevant literature has been cited. The citation of the species is more complete and includes the nomenclaturally relevant and the main Indian literature and synonyms, mostly rather lengthy descriptions, field notes, periods of flowering and fruiting, local names, specimens studied, the distribution world-wide and in India, uses if any, and sometimes notes mainly on nomenclature.

At a first glance, this flora makes a good impression. In many floras the key to the families is the weakest point. I have tried it with several tests taken at random and did not meet any difficulties. The same seems to hold true for the keys to the genera of two of the larger families, the Leguminosae with 39 genera and the Compositae with 28 genera. As to the latter key the last lead, 32b, leads to nothing, probably rightly so, and can be dropped. Furthermore, *Lactuca* keys out under 1a, flowers yellowish, which agrees with most species. However, the only species in this flora, *L. runcinata*, is described as having the flowers pinkish white and gets stuck under 1b accordingly. The key to the 55 genera of the largest family, the Grasses, will give lots of trouble. Lead 1b is simply lacking; couplet 21 (17 in the first edition, with the same problems) comes from nowhere which means that 11 genera are inaccessible; the first of the three leads under couplet 28 only repeats lead 27b and has to be dropped; couplet 31 seems to come from nowhere and encompasses three leads which are not clearly contrasting and the first of which apparently leads to nowhere – actually, lead 31a is the lacking lead 1b and leads to 32 and 39; couplet 33 has three leads of which only the 2nd and 3rd one are contrasting; finally, lead 55b leads to nowhere.

The idea behind the illustrations is not clear. Many families are not illustrated at all. A large family where drawings could be very useful are the Gramineae; they got only four figures. The Leguminosae got some more but mainly concentrated in two genera. Best are a few figures where the same organ of several species out of the same genus are depicted. Most of the figures are rather heavily printed and \pm unclear.

The descriptions of the species are mostly rather long, half a column or more; they could be much shortened, and it would be practical, moreover, if genus descriptions were given.

Finally, why are Indian publications so often crowded with printing errors?

It is a pity that a book like the present one which seems good in principle needlessly is disfigured by relatively easily avoidable mistakes. It is incomprehensible that so many mistakes from the 1st edition have not been corrected in this 2nd one.