

Review

Flora Zambesiaca, Volume 1, Part 1, published by the Crown Agents, London; 366 pp. including illustrations. Price 25s.

The title *Flora Zambesiaca* is an appropriate one for an international project of this kind dealing, as it does, with the flowering plants of territories linked by one of Africa's greatest rivers. The project is sponsored by the governments of Britain, Portugal and the Federation and deals with the territories of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, Mocambique and the Bechuanaland Protectorate. The *Flora* is produced by an editorial committee consisting of Dr. H. Wild of the Federal Herbarium, Salisbury, Mr. A. W. Exell of the British Museum (Natural History), Mr. J. P. M. Brenan of Kew and Dr. F. A. Mendonca of Portugal. The whole production is of a very high standard with an attractive format which could well serve as a model of its kind.

Included in this first part is a brief history of botanical exploration in the area, a selected bibliography, a glossary of botanical terms, a key to plant families, a map of the area and 58 excellent line drawings illustrating most of the genera described. The arrangement follows the Bentham and Hooker system and the families now dealt with extend from the Cycadaceae to the Polygalaceae, covering some 90 genera and 306 species. The text results from the collaboration of the following authors: G. Cufodontis (Pittosporaceae), A. W. Exell (Papaveraceae, Fumariaceae, Cruciferae, Polygalaceae), A. W. Exell and E. Milne-Redhead (Ranunculaceae), John Lewis (Gymnospermae), F. A. Mendonca (Nymphaceae), N. K. B. Robson (Annonaceae, Violaceae), P. Taylor (Resedaceae), G. Troupin (Menispermaceae) and H. Wild (Dilleniaceae, Berberidaceae, Cabombaceae, Capparidaceae, Bixaceae and Flacourtiaceae).

It is clear that a single publication dealing with the flowering plants of the whole of tropical Africa on the scale of the old *Flora of Tropical Africa* is too great a task for a single institution or government to undertake. Thus regional Floras have been embarked upon, based mainly on political subdivisions, and the *Flora Zambesiaca* is the most recent of these. To the north of the region covered, there is in progress the *Flora of Tropical East Africa*; to the north-west, the *Flore du Congo Belge et Ruanda Urundi*; and to the west, the *Conspectus Florae Angolensis*. To the south, work has started on a *Flora of Southern Africa*, the first part of which is nearly completed.

So little revisionary work has been done on African plants that it becomes necessary to carry out a small revision on practically every family dealt with. This is time-consuming work because, in order to arrive at the correct name to use for a species, variation must be studied throughout its entire range. The more thoroughly this is done, the more valuable will the publication be. Much of the earlier monographic work on African plants is unrealistic in that too many species are maintained on slender distinctions that are not supported by a study of the living plants in the field, or when a wider range of material has become available to the herbarium botanist. Even with the more extensive material now available, the delimitation of species limits in accordance with reality calls for good judgement. In both respects of thoroughness and judgement regarding species delimitation, the *Flora Zambesiaca* inspires confidence. Not only will botanists and field workers in the territories concerned find this a most valuable publication, but also those in adjoining territories.

One of the very few criticisms that can be made relates to the treatment of *Encephalartos vil osus* (Gaertn.) Lem., because the plants classified under this heading were separated some years ago as *E. umbeluziensis* R. A. Dyer.

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