

tropics. In its main portion, the book describes and illustrates the complete array of palms that are presently offered for sale by specialised nurseries. It also includes a sizeable and most instructive first, general part in which you will find a wealth of data on the origin, uses, morphology and cultivation of palms, as well as their tribal and subtribal classification. At the end, there are listings of species fulfilling a variety of criteria of aesthetics, hardiness and requirements, and a sizeable bibliography as well.

To me, however, the most noticeable quality of the book is the light-handed, amusing style in which it is written. It is rare to find a manual that one can read almost as if it were a novel. The author has that subtle sense of humour, that slight ironic touch that entertains without offending – as when he asks you, tongue in cheek, whether you happen to ignore the three fundamental laws of living beings that an author and reader must take into account: the laws of generally, of approximately, and of depending on, that govern individual variation; and he then smiles at human kind who, in obstinate blindness and unawares of the Creator's liberality in the matter, accepts the self-inflicted tyranny of the meter, foot and inch.

W.G.

## Floras

20. **Santiago CASTROVIEJO (gen. ed.), Gonzalo NIETO FELINER, Stephen L. JURY & Alberto HERRERO (vol. ed.) – Flora iberica.** Plantas vasculares de la Península Ibérica e Islas Baleares. Vol. X, *Araliaceae-Umbelliferae*. – Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Real Jardín Botánico, Madrid, 2003 (ISBN 84-00-08150-1, volume; 84-00-06221-3, set). XLV + 498 pages, map, 128 plates of drawings; cloth with dust jacket.

*Flora iberica*, the unequalled trendsetter among modern national Floras, is nearing half-way completion or, in optimistic terms, the point of no return. Happily, the publication of the present volume coincides with a grant renewal, showing that the funding agency, the Spanish Ministry of Science and Technology through its General Directorate of Research, is satisfied with the work done – as it well may be. Spain can take

justified pride in the impressive series that results from the combined efforts of Spain's leading botanical specialists of the young and older generation, working together in harmony.

The Flora is planned in 21 volumes, of which the present one is the 10<sup>th</sup>. Volumes 1 to 8 and 14 had been published previously (see OPTIMA Newslett. 36: (13)-(14). 2002), Nos. 9, 12, 13 and a few more are announced as imminent. The treatment of *Compositae* (vol. 16, presumably a twin volume, just as vol. 7 covering the legumes) and grasses (vol. 19) will likely be among the last to be published.

Volume 10 is devoted to 2 families of very unequal size, *Araliaceae* and *Umbelliferae*, totalling 84 genera and 220 species. The former is represented by the single genus *Hedera* (ivy), of which three species occur in Spain and Portugal – they are now arguably the best studied plants of that whole area. The umbel family is divided into innumerable mostly very small genera, none of which is highly critical taxonomically. No less than 45 are represented by a single species, and only three have 10 or more Iberian members of that rank: *Bupleurum* (17, by Susana NEVES), *Eryngium* (16, by Gonzalo NIETO), and *Peucedanum* (10, by Antonio GUILLÉN). Other medium-sized representatives, with 6 to 9 species each, are *Seseli*, *Pimpinella*, *Conopodium*, *Daucus*, *Laserpitium*, *Oenanthe*, *Thapsia*, and *Torilis*. All in all, 30 different authors have contributed to the volume, among which Stephen L. JURY (who wrote up 20 generic treatments and co-ordinated the production of several more) and Luís VILLAR (11 genera) must be mentioned in the first place.

The lay-out and pattern of presentation of the Flora are by now familiar and call for no special comment. The mere fact that they have not varied perceptibly through time is the best possible compliment to those who designed the Flora in the first place and continue to supervise it with relentless rigour. Santiago CASTROVIEJO, the central figure in the team, may be proud of how well those presently in charge are following in his footsteps. It is pleasing to report that the retirement of the first and most prominent illustrator of the Flora, Eugenio SIERRA, has not affected adversely the high standard of the drawings. In the person of J. L. CASTILLÓ, who signed most or all of the 128 plates, a worthy successor has been found.

W.G.