

## Book Reviews

*Wild flowers of Britain & Ireland*. M. Blamey, R. Fitter & A. Fitter. Pp. 482. A. & C. Black, London. 2003. Softback. £16.99. ISBN 0-7136-5944-0.

Most British botanists will be familiar with the work of Marjorie Blamey, Richard Fitter and Alastair Fitter. This book continues their tradition in admirable fashion. It is intended as a field guide, with illustrations of almost all vascular plant species found in the wild in Britain or Ireland, identification notes and maps. There are 482 pages, so it is slightly bulkier than many field guides, but could still be slipped into a rucksack with relative ease.

I initially learnt my botany using *Wild Flowers of Britain and Northern Europe* by the same authors, so I was interested to see how their new book compared to that classic text. An initial glance shows the familiar painting style of Marjorie Blamey, with excellent colour reproduction; however, the facing page immediately appears different, with the inclusion of thumbnail maps for the first time. The maps are based on the *New Atlas* data, with various other symbols intended to indicate how dominant or otherwise species are.

This is one of the few field guides to cover only Britain and Ireland. This decision particularly pleased me, as I have always felt that the average user will only use a book within the British Isles. By restricting the geographic coverage there is more room available to feature the British flora, and only some apomictic groups and the rarer non-natives have been missed. The authors have even attempted some of the complex groups such as *Salicornia*, *Sorbus* and *Euphrasia* with suitable warnings to the reader.

The authors have made an interesting use of keys. Large parts of the book are entirely without keys, forcing the beginner to turn the pages looking through the pictures. Far from being tiresome, I would advocate this as an excellent way to familiarise oneself with the various families. This is also less off-putting to the beginner than being faced by a dichotomous key. Many genera and some families have excellent summary tables, dividing the different species using a few very simply observed characters, such as flower colour or petal shape. These tables immediately restrict the number of pictures and descriptions that require consideration. A few larger families such as Apiaceae, Fabaceae and Asteraceae also have short keys, which direct you to a particular section of the family. I thought the keys provided were extremely helpful without being overpowering for beginners. The descriptions themselves have important characters for identification italicised.

An unusual feature of the book is the grouping at the end of various 'types' of plant. First, there are 'Aquatic plants with all leaves submerged'. This section is not dissimilar to that given in *Wild Flowers of Britain and Northern Europe*, although now the illustrations are in full colour. The title of the section is not entirely helpful, as not all of the species have all their leaves submerged, and neither are all such aquatic plants included here. For instance, *Ranunculus fluitans* is not included here, but is within the Ranunculaceae, whilst *Callitriche stagnalis* is included. Another section that I found somewhat awkward was 'Grasses, Sedges and Rushes'. A key at the start divides all three families up according to the form of the flowering head; the following illustrations are not divided by family but according to this key. I found this confusing, and would have preferred an opening section explaining how to tell the families apart, and then for each family to be covered separately. Further sections are: 'Trees and Tall Shrubs', 'Ferns, Horsetails and Clubmosses', 'Specialities of the Isles of Scilly and West Cornwall' and 'Irish specialities'.

My only real gripe in an otherwise excellent publication for aspiring botanists is the glossary. Most terms are illustrated, but using thumbnail illustrations which only show the part in question. I was not sure that beginners would find it easy to locate a stigma, having seen an illustration which does not show its relationship to the rest of the flower. Equally, I felt that illustrations of bracts and bracteoles would have been more helpful if the flowers were shown.

Overall, this is a very useful new field guide that I am sure will be used and enjoyed by both beginners and those who prefer pictorial guides. It is a worthy successor to the authors' earlier works.

C. CHEFFINGS

*Compendium of Symbolic and Ritual Plants in Europe*. Marcel de Cleene & M. C. Lejeune. 2 vols in boxed set, pp. 885 & 695. Mens & cultur uitgever, Ghent. Hardback. 2003. £115.00. ISBN 90-77135-04-9.

This attractively produced work seeks to cover plants 'which play or have played a part in man's religious experience.' Thus species such as *Achillea millefolium* and *Plantago lanceolata*, which feature extensively in folklore but not in ritual, are not included.

The authors have made little, if any, effort to collect current material but have relied on previously published work, including websites. This is excusable given the area they are trying to cover, but for many regions the previously published work is of a poor quality. Inevitably the authors' linguistic abilities have a great deal of influence on what they have used. I also suspect that they failed to make any systematic attempt to find out what is available. For the British Isles the authors rely mainly on Margaret Baker's *Discovering the Folklore of Plants* (ed. 3, 1996) and Vickery's *Dictionary of Plant-lore* (1995). The latter attempted to gather unpublished material, but the former is a popular introduction to its subject which relies mainly on material published late in the 19th Century, which in turn used material derived from a variety of 'old authors'. Thus by the time it is used by de Cleene & Lejeune it is already third-hand.

The authors tend to regard all customs and beliefs as survivals from earlier cultures, and works such as James Frazer's *Golden Bough* loom in the background. Most present-day folklorists reject such speculations. For example, we are told that 'in the late 1950s there was *still* a belief in Thorncombe, Dorset, that alder was good against gout'. This statement is derived from Vickery (1995) where he records his grandfather's (unsuccessful) attempt to treat gout, but does not claim that this was a long accepted remedy. De Cleene & Lejeune's inclusion of 'still' implies that the cure was of ancient origin.

The *Compendium* is divided into two volumes, the first dealing with trees and shrubs and the second with herbs. Rather confusingly, *Thymus* is included in the first volume. Each volume starts with a series of essays, one of which, on 'early herbalists and herbalist writings', is included in both, followed by alphabetical entries on the plants which the authors consider to be ritual or symbolic. These consist of a description of the plant, common names (apparently a very incomplete selection for some parts of the continent), and extensive notes on the folklore, etc., associated with the plant. The authors tend to be 'lumpers'. Both *Malus sylvestris* and *M. domestica* are included under 'Apple tree', with the description referring primarily to the former but most of the consideration of apples in ritual, myth and symbolism referring to the latter. *Leucanthemum vulgare* and *Dendranthema × grandiflorum* are both included under the heading 'Crown daisy'. *Aesculus hippocastanum* is mentioned under 'Sweet chestnut' 'because people often confuse its fruits ... with those of sweet chestnut'. In some cases it is difficult to work out to which species the text refers. However, the work is meticulously provided with references, so it should be possible to sort out any confusion. In addition to providing standard footnotes stating where information was published, the authors also provide information on people mentioned in the text – something which is valuable when one realises one nation's hero may be unknown to citizens of other countries. Unfortunately, at least as far as the British monarchy goes, these notes tend to be inaccurate.

The authors have assembled a vast quantity of plant-lore and include over 550 useful illustrations. Folklorists will regret that they have followed outdated ideas concerning survivals; botanists will regret that they have excessively 'lumped.'

A. R. VICKERY

*Flora of North America north of Mexico. Volume 25 Magnoliophyta: Commelinidae (in part): Poaceae part 2*. Flora of North America Editorial Committee. Pp. xxv + 783. Oxford University Press, Oxford. 2003. Hardback. £70.00. ISBN 0 19 516748 1.

In the purest sense a Flora serves the dual purpose of a catalogue of biodiversity and a manual for identification. Ideally it should contain diagnostic keys as well as suitable descriptions and illustrations that enable the users to be confident of their identifications. It is, therefore, the ultimate practical expression of the skills of the taxonomist. I begin to get nervous of Floras that are used for other purposes, particularly as a platform for presenting the latest theories on plant

phylogeny. The present volume of the Flora of North America (FNA) opens with a discussion of the PACCAD clade of grasses. If anything were ever a theoretical concept of no practical value, it is that of the BEPP & PACCAD clades. However much this concept may appear to be a logical explanation of the findings of molecular phylogenists, the Flora-writer can make no use of it. The clades are not taxonomic ranks in any sense; they have no morphological reality and they are unpredictable from a plant's morphology. Discussion of these clades, in my view, is best left for a more appropriate forum than a regional Flora.

Volume 25 is the second part of the account of *Poaceae* and it is regrettable that it must be reviewed in the absence of volume 24, which has not yet been published. There may have been sound practical reasons for leaving volume 24 until volume 25 had been completed, but nevertheless it is difficult to assess the latter's contents in isolation. Volume 24 will contain the key to tribes as well as an artificial key to genera. I have some misgivings about that second key; if the taxonomy is sound and the key to tribes is well constructed, there should not be a need for an artificial key to genera.

Mysteriously, this volume presents a key to the tribes it contains, but for the life of me I cannot understand why. With or without volume 24 to hand, who would know – simply by looking at it – whether or not a grass belonged in the PACCAD clade and could therefore be keyed out in this volume? Inclusion of this key is an error of judgment and a waste of space. The key itself is very curious. It has only 14 couplets and yet it manages to key out Danthoniae three times. This suggests either a poor tribal concept or poor key-writing. Couplet 7 seems to be entirely redundant. Its first lead takes the user to Danthoniae and its second lead to couplet 8. The first lead of couplet 8 takes the user, again, to Danthoniae. The account of grass genera to be found in Clayton & Renvoize *Genera Graminum* (1986) may be getting a little out of date by now, but it was an eminently practical account. The authors knew that Danthoniae and Arundineae could not be separated morphologically with any degree of conviction and chose to amalgamate them. Molecular phylogenists claim that not only are they different at tribal level but at subfamily level as well. The account in FNA has failed to convince me of this.

I was also disappointed to see that the amalgamation of Cynodonteae and Eragrostideae is maintained. The change from multi-flowered spikelets, with separately disarticulating florets, in panicles or racemes found in Eragrostideae, to spikelets with one fertile floret, with all florets falling together, in racemes (these sometimes much reduced or modified) found in Cynodonteae is fundamental enough to demonstrate the practical value of grass tribes. If these two elements are not tribes, molecular data notwithstanding, it is difficult to know what are. The characters used in FNA to demarcate Orcuttiae and Pappophoreae are far less significant than those that at one time demarcated Cynodonteae from Eragrostideae. With the amalgamation of these two tribes we have a situation of taxonomic inflation wherein the tribe is now scarcely distinguishable from the subfamily.

The nomenclature of the grass 'inflorescence' has been a problem from the very beginning, but agrostologists have long since learnt to come to terms with it and have settled into a number of conventions. Attempts at a more rigid nomenclature have generally been ignored. When I tried the key to genera of Paniceae I had to go back and start afresh because I thought I had missed something. The option presented at couplet 2, lead 2, was 'inflorescence panicles, sometimes spike-like.' In my experience a spike-like panicle belongs to such genera as *Alopecurus* and *Phleum*, and in the present context *Pennisetum*, where the panicle looks like a spike. After going back over the text I found that a new term, unfamiliar to many of us, had been introduced. There are, it seems, no multiple racemes any more, be they digitate or scattered along an elongated axis. The elements of the inflorescence of *Digitaria*, for example, are called 'rames', and a panicle composed of discrete rames is, apparently, a spike-like panicle. The term 'spike-like' now embraces two entirely different concepts and its use in the present context will confuse rather than clarify. The conventional terms describing the grass inflorescence have been with us for so long that they have become indispensable even if they are, from time to time, rather strained; we all know what the terms mean and if something isn't broken why try to fix it?

This is a huge account of a very difficult family and it is easy to pick holes in it and find fault with it. There are no absolutes in taxonomy and for this reason no-one has yet written a perfect Flora; it is doubtful if anyone ever will. Whatever, in my view, may be wrong with this volume, it is nevertheless a magnificent achievement and is written to a consistently high standard. All the

elements of a traditional Flora are there: descriptions are complete but not over-long; the keys in general work well; the ecological notes are brief but informative; and the illustrations are first-class (many are familiar from the earlier work of Hitchcock). I would, however, have liked to have seen at least the major synonyms in the text. All synonyms are to be found in an index, but it can only be used in one direction: it tells the user the accepted name of a synonym, but not the synonyms of an accepted name. Fortunately the grass synonym database at Kew and the Tropicos database in Washington take care of this.

All contributing authors are to be congratulated on this monumental achievement and I look forward (with some trepidation I have to admit) to volume 24. The volume is priced at £70 which seems reasonable enough for a book of this size, but multiply that by the number of volumes proposed and it is evident that the complete Flora will make a very serious hole in the budget of any library. There is, on the other hand, a value-for-money criterion which this particular volume seems adequately to fulfil.

T. A. COPE

*The Isle of Wight Flora*. C. Pope, L. Snow & D. Allen. Pp. 255. The Dovecote Press, Dorset. 2003. Hardback. £35.00. ISBN 1-904349-28-5.

Islands are often especially attractive places to botanise and Wight, with its diversity of habitats, is no exception. Drawing on a long history of recording by distinguished botanists (including Bromfield, Townsend and Lousley), this scholarly and thorough book, the first detailed flora since 1978, fills a definite gap in the recent floras produced in southern England and sits very nicely alongside the excellent *Flora of Hampshire* (1996). The introduction by Richard Smout sets the scene beautifully, discussing the concept of Wight as the Garden Isle and indicating how early man had a horticultural influence on the flora (as early as 1798 Gilpin stated that the island "...is, in fact, a large garden..."). A detailed chapter on geology and physical features (Allan Insole) follows, although I was a little disappointed that more space was not given to the flooding of the Solent and the creation of the island itself. After a short chapter on climate (Denis Simmons), a very detailed and informative account of the island's palaeoecological record is given by Rob Scaife. This describes vegetational changes over the last 12,000 years, drawing on a wealth of evidence from famous sites such as Bohemia Bog, and is one of the clearest and most readable of such accounts I've seen. Again, the huge effect man has had on the island's flora is brought sharply into focus, and events like the clearing of the Small-leaved Lime woodland in the late Bronze Age make a lasting impression on the reader. A short comparison of the island's flora with that of neighbouring counties by Francis Rose is followed by David Allen's chapter on the history of recording. Being full of anecdotes and observations, this is one of the most enjoyable chapters in the book. It illustrates wonderfully how luck and chance have played vital roles in the history of botanical recording, and how the island has depended on social and economic tides to bring botanists to its shore from the mainland, only subsequently to remove them. In the final introductory chapter, Colin Pope describes the island's vegetation in detail. Not only are particular species and habitats described, again often with enlightening anecdotes, but management issues are also discussed and the chapter has a strong ecological background. My only complaint would be the lack of Latin names for vascular plants.

The main species accounts follow a typical format. For vascular plants, records stretch from the 16th Century to 2002, with the "most recent" records dated from 1987 (in line with the *New Atlas*, recording for which was the stimulus behind producing this flora). Recording in this period was, admirably, site- or 1 km square based. From these data, tetrad maps have been produced for some taxa but, again admirably, only where this adds additional information to the species accounts. The accounts themselves are concise but informative and are not restricted to a maximum number of words. This allows nice discussions of, for example, the increase in *Asplenium trichomanes* subsp. *quadrivalens* since the 19th Century and the decline of *Cirsium dissectum*, as well as the longer discussions of rarer species you would expect in a flora. Coverage is good; hybrids and subspecies are treated tolerably well and there is good recording of aliens, which are given with the *New Atlas* categories of archaeophyte or neophyte, the latter either established, surviving, planted or casual. Colin Pope pointed out to me the accidental omission of *Aster tripolium*, although a Dines &

Preston record of *Convallaria majalis* also seems to have been omitted. My only other criticisms would be the lack of any analysis of the data (such as numbers of native, archaeophyte and neophyte taxa, maps showing numbers of records and species per tetrad) and the poor quality of the tetrad maps, perhaps because they were reproduced from poor resolution computer image files ('bitmaps'). The chapters covering bryophytes (Lorna Snow), lichens (Colin Pope) and stoneworts (Nick Stewart) follow the same format and are similarly detailed and informative, with plenty of discussion and historical context. They add substantially to the value of the book and it's nice to see selected bryophytes mapped as well. Finally, it's worth mentioning the excellent photographs and reproductions of colour paintings that illustrate the Flora. A good mix of vascular and non-flowering plants are included, and those of bryophytes are particularly fine.

This is a lovely flora that will appeal to all that know the Isle of Wight, residents and visitors alike. It will particularly appeal to those with a serious interest in the flora, as the level of detail is sufficient to keep enquiring minds satisfied. It is a credit to the authors and the efforts of all those that have contributed records, especially given the short time in which it has been produced. A lesson to some other vice-counties perhaps!

T. D. DINES

*Botaniska strövtåg. Svenska och engelska.* M Rydén. Pp. 182. Acta Academiae Regiae Gustavi Adolphi LXXXII. 2003. Softback. 190 kr. ISSN 0065-0897. ISBN 91-85352-51-9.

Consider the cornflower. Once a troublesome weed – though one whose receptacle could be eaten like an artichoke – today it is a “fair and futile flower”. Its English name reflects its habitat, where the Swedish designation, *blåklint*, describes the colour and shape of its budding flowers. Local names such as *hurt-sickle* or *båtsmansmössa*, “bosun’s cap”, reflect the fertility of popular imagination as well as the effects of its hard stem on reapers’ tools.

The cornflower is just one of a series of “plant portraits” by Mats Rydén, emeritus professor of English at Umeå and Uppsala universities. Originally written for Swedish newspapers and for the journal of the Swedish Botanical Society, they now appear together with brief essays on themes from the history of Swedish and English botany, under the title *Botaniska strövtåg*, “botanical rambles”. They range from the groves of his own home parish – echoing still with the Romantic poetry as well as the prosaic plant descriptions of Krok-Almquist, the flora used by generations of Swedish school-children – to the herbals of English 16th Century naturalists William Turner and John Gerard. Whether Swedish or English, most of Rydén’s botanical rambles take him through the borderland between language and botany. In the plant life of Shakespeare’s plays as well as in the diversity of vernacular plant names, Rydén explores past and present conceptions and uses of plants.

Rydén’s portraits are impressions rather than full-length, tantalisingly and sometimes frustratingly brief. Recommendations in the text to further reading (to the linguistic studies of Rydén and others as well to as the growing field of ethnobotany) are helpful, but also draw attention to the limitations of the form. Despite the brief English summary, *Botaniska strövtåg* is largely inaccessible to a non-Swedish-speaking audience. English readers may refer to Rydén’s investigations of plant names, some of which have been published in English – but they would miss the musings of Swedish poets on wild strawberries, and the joy of a glimpse of *Creeping Lady’s tresses* in the forest.

J. BECKMAN

*The vice-county census catalogue of the vascular plants of Great Britain.* Edited by C. A. Stace, R. G. Ellis, D. H. Kent and D. J. McCosh. Pp. xxii + 405. Botanical Society of the British Isles, London. 2003. Paperback. Price £11.00. ISBN 0-901158-30-5.

It is now more than 70 years since Druce’s *Comital Flora of the British Isles* made its posthumous appearance. In the intervening period, the B.S.B.I. has made extensive use of the vice-county system, appointing Recorders for each of the 111 British vice-counties, as well as for the 40 Irish vice-counties and for the Isle of Man and Channel Islands. New vice-county records are regularly published in *Watsonia*, but it has been almost impossible for the ordinary botanist to know whether

or not a record is indeed new. This curious state of affairs could well lead the sceptic to ask whether vice-counties have had their day. Perhaps they ought to be banished into the past along with those divisions of counties based on parishes and river catchments, used by our Victorian ancestors in local floras.

If vice-counties are indeed an archaic remnant, then the new *Census Catalogue* is not timely. A modern botanist ought to use the National Grid and stick to the information in the *New Atlas*. The alternative view is that the B.S.B.I. has been deplorably remiss in not keeping the system up to date, and that this new volume fills a major gap and is sorely needed. Surely this must be the majority opinion. Indeed, the new *Census Catalogue* will be seen by many as a major achievement, to be greeted with relief and joy because local loyalties are strong. Vice-counties 'are the units ... to which most field botanists demonstrate some chauvinistic allegiance; a species discovered new to Leicestershire will always be greeted with more interest than one discovered new to hectad 42/58, or to  $100 \times 100$  km square 42'.

So what is presented here? The basic catalogue occupies 380 pages, about the same as Druce's 398. At first sight, the catalogue is pretty bleak. Ireland has been banished to the Irish. Unlike the British they have published several excellent recent vice-county catalogues, most recently *A Catalogue of Alien Plants in Ireland* (2002), which is almost exactly the same size as the catalogue under review. The *Census Catalogue*, by contrast, is brutally numeric. It is simply the numerical expression of a database. Plants are not described as 'viatical', 'sylvestral' or 'ericetal' in the style of Druce. There is no information on when they were first discovered in Britain. On the other hand, we are offered numerical data on the occurrence in vice-counties of an astonishing 4880 taxa. For *Cypripedium calceolus* L. the distribution reads **57 60 62 64 65 66 69 70**. This tells us that it formerly occurred in Derbyshire, North-east Yorkshire, North-west Yorkshire, County Durham, Westmorland and Cumberland (57, 62, 65, 66, 69, 70), and that since 1969 it has been found in West Lancashire (60) as an introduction and in Mid-west Yorkshire (64) as a native. For *Bellis perennis* the distribution reads C 1 2 3 ... **110 111 112**, signifying that the common daisy has since 1970 been found as a native in all vice-counties.

The key to this code is the footer to each page: **Bold** = native; Roman = archaeophyte; *Italic* = neophyte; *Small italic* = casual; Underline = post-1970. This symbolism is not easy to read. Nor is it as simple as might appear. For example, the distinction between archaeophyte and neophyte was introduced only at a late stage. Almost all vice-comital occurrences of species that are archaeophytes in Britain are treated as archaeophytic, even though the date of introduction to some counties must have been post-1500. It is just too hard to know when species were in fact introduced. Vice-county Recorders did not know; neither did the editors.

With neophytes, the ascription of casual status is almost equally arbitrary, because consistent standards have not been applied. We read that *Picea sitchensis* is casual in Dumfriesshire – i.e. that it cannot maintain itself there by seeding. Any visitor to the Forest of Ae can see it coming up like grass (so to speak). On the other hand, *Larix kaempferi*, less prolifically self-seeding, is signified as a non-casual neophyte there. *Avena sativa* is apparently a persistent neophyte in South Somerset and Caithness, and was formerly persistent in Easternness and Easter Ross; elsewhere it is merely a casual. Here, the views of Vice-county Recorders were presumably taken into account, but one may doubt whether the plant ever forms persistent populations.

The treatment of hybrids is initially confusing. Most are technically natives. Thus the highly sterile *Papaver rhoeas* × *dubium* is treated as a former native in eight vice-counties, where its parents were mere archaeophytes. Yet anything more casual than a sterile hybrid of annuals is hard to imagine. Likewise, casual occurrences of native species cannot be distinguished from persistent populations unless the species was introduced. *Himantoglossum hircinum* was formerly native in North-east Yorkshire but it arrived in 1940 and never persisted.

Even the native status of possibly native species can be difficult to ascertain. As the editors ruefully observe, 'many of the status decisions made and represented in the census text are arguable to say the least'. Some explanation would have helped. For example, the ascription of native status to *Tanacetum vulgare* in some counties but not others seems completely arbitrary. The text of the *New Atlas* tells us why its status is often unknowable, but *Census Catalogue* data are presented without comment.

The *Census Catalogue* is weakened by these inconsistencies. In particular, it cannot be used as a reliable guide to whether or where a species is persistent. On the other hand, we have here a good

foundation on which to build. Those of us who know the highly efficient vice-county recording scheme run by the British Bryological Society (as Recording Secretary of the B.B.S., this reviewer ought not to be *too* smug), are often amazed by the apparent laxity and inefficiency of that run by the B.S.B.I. Of course recording is easier with bryophytes, because they are fewer, smaller and easily sent through the post. The bryophyte system runs with just two national Recorders, who, together with referees, check specimens of all putative vice-county records. In addition, vice-county recorders (an incomplete set for Britain and only one for Ireland) are listed with their e-mail addresses on the B.B.S. website. By contrast, nowhere on the B.S.B.I. website is recording at the vice-county scale given any prominence. This is because the B.S.B.I. does not have a formal, official vice-county recording scheme. Now is the time to start one. Otherwise, the present volume will suffer the same fate as its predecessor, and become an interesting historical document that is largely ignored.

Let us hope, on the contrary, that we see a genuinely new beginning. The *Census Catalogue* is not perfect. There are even few minor errors, e.g. *Quercus* wrongly indexed, *Pseudofumaria lutea* indicated as native in v.c. 7 and *Larix kaempferi* as native in v.c. 1. But any difficulties arising from these imperfections are trivial in comparison with those that would exist if the authors had not courageously and painstakingly collated this splendid database.

M. O. HILL

*The Flora of Huntingdonshire and the Soke of Peterborough*. T. C. E. Wells. Pp. xxxiii + 203. Huntingdonshire Flora and Fauna Society and the author, Upwood, Huntingdon. 2003. Hardback. £17.00. ISBN 0-9514427-2-4.

Huntingdonshire has been fortunate in the past in having received a considerable amount of botanical attention but, until now, this low-lying area of Britain has been one of the few counties without a recent flora.

In the 17th Century, John Ray first recorded *Auricula leporis minima* (*Bupleurum tenuissimum* Slender Hare's-ear) near Ellesley and throughout the 1800s botanists such as the Rev. W. W. Newbould and the Rev. W. R. Linton noted and collected plants. Alfred Fryer, best known for his *Potamogeton* studies, also published a list of Huntingdonshire plants and had even contemplated writing a Flora. In 1926, George Claridge Druce used many of these previous lists of plants and published them in the Botany section of the Victoria County History. In more recent times, John Gilbert, a founder member of the Huntingdonshire Fauna and Flora Society, provided most of the records for the 1962 *Atlas of the British Flora* and published a check-list of plants found in the county but without detail. It was not until Terry Wells succeeded John Gilbert as Vice-county Recorder, in 1967, that plans were made to write a county Flora.

The author of the present Flora was soon to discover that there were many obstacles to overcome. The county may be one of the flattest in Britain but Terry was to have an uphill struggle! The original boundaries of the Watsonian vice-county 31 coincided very closely with the administrative county boundaries and it seemed sensible to base the Flora on this area. However, changes in the administrative boundary of Huntingdonshire took place in 1965, and the county now included the Soke of Peterborough. After discussion with Dr John Dony, the author also decided to include this area, thus enlarging the scope for botanical recording by just over a third but, unfortunately, gaining no new recorders in this area to help with the extra work. In recompense, a glance at the Species Richness map on page xiii shows that this north westerly area of the county increases the floral interest of the county as it contains a limestone area including Barnack Hills and Holes and Castor Hanglands National Nature Reserves. Species such as *Pulsatilla vulgaris* and *Antennaria dioica* would not, otherwise, have been in this Flora!

Systematic recording began in 1967 and was on a tetrad, 2 km × 2 km, basis. Each of the 382 tetrads was visited in spring, summer and autumn, which, although the effort involved was huge, has added greatly to the value of the flora. This was particularly important in the Soke, as previous coverage, published in *The Flora of Northamptonshire and the Soke of Peterborough* by Gill Kent, Rob Wilson *et al.* in 1995, was based on records made by the Kettering and District Natural History Society only on a 5 km square basis. Distribution maps were prepared for 837 species, the Flora being intended for publication by 1991. For various reasons, not least the bankruptcy of the

chosen publisher, the author was unfortunately obliged to postpone this. Recording continued during meetings of the Huntingdonshire Flora and Fauna Society, other records being added during the B.S.B.I. Monitoring Scheme, 1987–8, the Arable Weed Survey, 1989, and again during data gathering for *Scarce Plants in Britain*, 1994, and the *New Atlas*, 2002. The inclusion of these additional, recent records has certainly enhanced the present volume although the map symbols do not differentiate between older and more recent records. Over 600 maps are included but taxonomically difficult genera such as *Taraxacum* are, understandably, not mapped and in the case of *Rubus* the author candidly says ‘I have been unable to take an interest in the *Rubi...*’.

The 1250 species accounts include the date of the first record in the county where this is known, the status, and excellent habitat descriptions, which reflect the author’s intimate knowledge of Huntingdonshire, followed by the number of tetrads in which it occurs. Rare and ‘interesting’ species are given site names and grid references. Perhaps it would have been helpful to include a gazetteer of other localities mentioned in the text? There is, however, a table showing the Nature Reserves (with grid references, details of ownership and acreage), which is particularly important as many of the rare and special plants of Huntingdonshire occur in these reserves. For example, *Viola persicifolia* occurs at Woodwalton Fen, *Lythrum portula* at Monks Wood, *Aceras anthropophorum* at Barnack Hills and Holes and *Primula elatior* reaches one of its most westerly sites in Europe in Waresley Wood.

*Melampyrum cristatum*, another of the county’s ‘special’ plants, is most attractively portrayed on the front cover and the colour photographs inside show superb views of four Nature Reserves and 23 excellent portraits of some of Huntingdonshire’s beautiful plants.

This Flora has been long awaited. In spite of numerous setbacks and more recent severe health problems, Terry Wells, together with his wife Sheila, has produced a magnificent book. Not only will it be invaluable to all of us who live and work in Huntingdonshire but it will join the ranks of those recently published Floras used widely by botanists throughout Britain.

J. M. CROFT

#### PROFILES OF THE REVIEWERS

DR JENNY BECKMAN works at the Department for History of Science and Ideas at Uppsala University. Her interests include 19th and 20th Century Swedish vernacular plant names.

DR CHRIS CHEFFINGS was until recently involved in the teaching and promotion of plant biology to primary school and university students and to the general public. She is currently the Plant and Fungal Conservation Advisor at the Joint Nature Conservation Committee.

DR TOM COPE is a taxonomist at the Herbarium, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. He is a grass specialist who is currently preparing an account of the British species for the *BSBI handbook* series.

MRS JANE CROFT has lived in Huntingdonshire since 1966. She worked at the Biological Records Centre, Monks Wood, until her recent retirement, using county floras as a source of plant records on an almost daily basis.

DR TREVOR DINES was born and bred in Hampshire. He was a co-editor of the *New Atlas of the British and Irish flora* (2002) and is currently Plantlife Wales Officer. He is undertaking fieldwork, with Ian Bonner, for a new Flora of Anglesey.

DR MARK HILL was co-author of the 1981 edition of the British Bryological Society’s census catalogue, *Distribution of bryophytes in the British Isles*. He is currently head of the Biological Records Centre, Monks Wood.

ROY VICKERY is the Senior Curator in the Department of Botany, Natural History Museum, London. He has written extensively on the folklore of plants.