

Collins (London, £5.95) has recently taken the daring step of issuing *An Atlas of Wildflowers of Great Britain and Northern Europe* compiled by Alastair Fitter, consisting of almost 2,000 maps of species distribution in northwest Europe. It is a daring step in that such a book cannot hope to have the immediate appeal of the colour picture book, yet it must be regarded as one of the most valuable contributions to popular botany of the decade. Apart from the obvious use of such maps in plant hunting, the enthusiast who has learned basic plant identification from the field guides will now be able to consider what environmental factors, such as climate and human modification of habitats, are instrumental in the production of the distributions described here. It should also provide a more balanced attitude to conservation of the British flora, for, although such glamorous species as *Cypripedium calceolus* are bound to attract much effort on the part of preservationists, some of the most distinctively 'British' plants are the oceanic heathland types such as *Ulex gallii*. This realisation may increase public awareness of the need for the conservation of these internationally scarce habitats which we rather take for granted.

Lys de Bray's *The Wild Garden: An Illustrated Guide to Weeds* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson: London, £6.95) concentrates on weed species and falls closer to the coffee-table end of the spectrum than the field guide end. It is very much a folk lore type of book with an abundance of legendary material and herbal recipes. John and Susan Proctor's *Nature's Use of Colour in Plants and Their Flowers* (Peter Lowe/Eurobook: London, £3.95) also gives an initial coffee-table impression, especially in its lavish full-page colour illustrations of flowers like *Strelitzia* and of fruits like the apple. It does, however, go far beyond this level in discussing the nature and function of plant pigments, and of pollination mechanisms. A chapter on plant mimicry is particularly valuable, as this is a subject rarely dealt with in popular texts. Both Batesian and Mullerian mimicry are explained and illustrated from the plant kingdom. Parts of this book could be read by sixth-form (advanced school) students and first-year undergraduates with great benefit.

North American plant books are represented in this list by a field guide, *Wildflowers and Weeds*, by B. Courtney and J. Zimmerman (Van Nostrand Reinhold: Wokingham, UK, paperback £5.30) and by a coffee-table book, *Wild Flowers of Canada*, by M. Ferguson and R. Saunders (Van Nostrand Reinhold, £15.15). The latter contains some superb colour photographs of plants arranged in habitats and links these to brief, if prosaic, text descriptions. With only 150 species described it does not provide adequate information for identification. *Wildflowers and Weeds* consists of a series of small

colour photographs covering 650 species from the Great Lakes area. Arrangement is taxonomic and text notes are reduced to a bare minimum. The small size of the photographs and their poor quality of reproduction limit the value of this book, which otherwise emulates the approach of Polunin in Europe. It presents no challenge to the Tory Peterson guides in North America.

Finally, there is a coffee-table book by W. P. A. Jackson, *Wild Flowers of Table Mountain* (Howard Timmins: Cape Town, £12.95), which has some excellent photographs of flowers growing in their natural setting on Table Mountain, South Africa. The text is informative and interesting and should appeal to horticulturalists with a penchant for the Cape flora.

Orchid guide

A Field Guide to the Orchids of Britain and Europe with North Africa and the Middle East. By J. G. Williams, A. E. Williams and N. Arlott. Pp.176. (Collins: London, 1978.) £4.95

SOONER or later, most amateur botanists reach a point the popular, general floras seem not to describe their latest discovery, while the specialised works are too bulky, too costly, or only available in a library. Those whose problem lies with identifying wild orchids, not only in Britain, but virtually anywhere within reach of the home-based holiday traveller, should be frustrated no longer, for this new field guide ranges geographically from the Azores to the Urals, by way of Iceland and the countries of the Maghreb. It describes and illustrates 138 species, as well as a large number of sub-species and varieties, is small enough to go in the pocket, and is very reasonably priced.

The lay-out is convenient, each description being faced by the relevant illustration, although the very small type may prove a problem for those whose sight is not what it was. A few introductory paragraphs are followed by a key to the genera—which seems a trifle unnecessary—and more detailed keys to *Ophrys* and *Orchis*; the authors have wisely not attempted a key to the complex genus *Dactylorhiza*. In general, the *Flora Europea* classification has been followed, but it is unfortunate that means of correlating this with the nomenclature adopted in older floras are not provided. Descriptions of the individual species are in general sufficient and accurate, although there may still be some frustration over sorting out the scarcer Mediterranean species of *Ophrys*, and, inevitably, the *Dactylorhizas*. Some mention might have been made, too, of the many interesting, puzzling and not uncommon inter-generic hybrids which are features of the family as a whole. One might also query some of the authors' assessments

The radiative evolution of flower books seem to be operating on a number of major lines. Photographs are taking over from detailed and accurate artwork, which is unfortunate. Some attempt is being made to provide information over and above that which is relevant to identification; this is to be welcomed. What needs to be developed is the use of simple keys to add precision to the identification processes (for example, with the yellow Composites) and the placing of plant species into habitat contexts so that their interactions can be better appreciated.

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Oncidium lanceanum (Orchidaceae)

Mary Evans Picture Library

of the rarity of certain species, and their data on distribution are not always as complete or up-to-date as they might be.

The illustrations are perhaps somewhat less satisfactory. At least as here reproduced, they do not reach the high standard attained in other books in this series, and it is at times evident that, as is made clear in the Introduction, the artist has worked from the authors' sketches, and has never seen the living plant. Considerable attention is given, too, to enlargements of parts of no particular value as aids to identification by the ordinary amateur. Two excellent features that follow the main text are an unusually full glossary, and a check list wherein the reader can record his or her own personal finds. In general, these are minor criticisms of points easily rectifiable in a later edition; they certainly do not detract from the general usefulness of a book, which fills a notable gap in the amateur botanist's library. **Peter Collins**

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