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Flora of West Tropical Africa

F. N. HEPPER

Since the last AETFAT Conference in 1970, the whole revision of the "Flora of West Tropical Africa" has been completed and the last part published. This is an appropriate time, therefore, to record some facts about the project which covers all territories in West Africa south of latitude 18°N and to the west of Lake Chad, and Fernando Po.

The first edition (1927-1936) by J. Hutchinson & J. M. Dalziel set a new format for African floras by being concise, relying on keys rather than on lengthy descriptions and well illustrated. It gave Africa its first handy regional work suitable for field and herbarium use.

After the second world war it was out of print yet the demand was greater than ever. A revision was proposed but Dalziel had died in 1948 and Hutchinson had officially retired in the same year. Thus R. W. J. Keay was seconded from the Nigerian Forest Service to Kew in 1951 for "two years" to revise it. He made certain changes in the format and area covered, i.e. the linking of cited localities with collectors' name and number, and the reduction of the northern boundary from 23°30' to 18°N, in order to exclude some of the species of Mediterranean affinity in the central Sahara. Nobody realised what an undertaking a revision would entail, for the immense taxonomic activity in recent years had multiplied the new species (and synonyms) as well as the actual specimens, which involve much manhandling. A member of the Kew Herbarium staff, F. N. Hepper, assisted Keay from 1953 to 1957 when he returned to Nigeria after completing Volume 1 (Parts 1 and 2) and Hepper assumed editorship from 1957 for Volumes 2 and 3. H. Huber was engaged for a few months in 1957, and from 1958 to 1962 H. H. Heine worked on certain families. Specialists were invited to contribute revisions of their particular interest (genera or families), which gave the new edition considerable authority. As the taxonomic revision proceeded, it became clear that the original concept of relying on the old *Flora of Tropical Africa* for references was no longer tenable, so fuller references and synonymy were included in the revision. It was, therefore, more in the nature of a new work than is implied by the designation "Second Edition".

Two comparative analyses of the taxa included in each edition have been published [F. N. Hepper "Numerical analysis of the 'Flora of West Tropical Africa': I. Pteridophytes, Gymnosperms, Angiosperms (Dicotyledons)" in *Kew Bull.* 19/3: 443-450 (1965), and "Angiosperms (Monocotyledons)" in *Kew Bull.* 27/2: 305-307 (1972)]. The grand totals are, of course, not increased simply by additions from extensive collecting, although many have been added in this way, but they are the net conclusions from the taxonomic research involved in the preparation of the revision. Thus many taxa have been sunk and others re-instated, as well as new species found, giving a net increase of some 1600 species, a figure approaching that of the entire British flora.

First edition totals: 183 families, 1475 genera, 5639 species + 70 imperfectly known.

Second edition totals: 229 families, 1742 genera, 7072 species + 277 imperfectly known.

The dates of publication of the revised edition are as follows (ISBN is 0-85592-020-3 and the work is obtainable from H. M. Stationery Office, P.O. Box 569, London SE1 9NH).

Volume I, Part 1: 17 August 1954 (3000 copies; 2000 copies reprinted 1966).

Volume I, Part 2: 27 March 1958 (3000 copies, 2000 copies reprinted 1973).

Volume II: 18 October 1963 (3000 copies).

Volume III, Part 1: 28 August 1968 (5000 copies).

Volume III, Part 2: 2 May 1972 (5000 copies).

Two supplements have been published: *The ferns and fern-allies of West Tropical Africa* by A. H. G. Alston (October 1959, Crown Agents) and *Plant collectors in West Africa* by F. N. Hepper & F. Neate (1971, published by A. Oosthoek's Uitgeversmaatschappij for the International Bureau for Plant Taxonomy and Nomenclature, Utrecht). The latter is a biographical index of those who have collected herbarium material of flowering plants and ferns within the Flora boundaries.

A revision is attpresent being undertaken by H. M. Burkill of J. M. Dalziel's *Useful plants of West Tropical Africa* which appeared in 1937 as an Appendix to the Flora.