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Review of *East African Plant Collectors*

JAMES W. BYNG

Plant Gateway, 5 Talbot Street, Hertford, Hertfordshire, SG13 7BX, UK. Email: j.w.byng@abdn.ac.uk

East African Plant Collectors by Diana and Roger Polhill.
London: Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, 2015.
520 pp. 297 x 210 mm. Over 250 b/w photographs.
Hardback. ISBN: 978-1842463710. Publisher's price £80.

The *Flora of Tropical East Africa*, covering Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania, was one of the largest regional floras ever compiled, with over 12,000 wild plant species and taking 64 years to complete. The *East African Plant Collectors* is the perfect supplement to this great flora and is a wonderful compendium of botanists, collectors and authors showing the human element of the flora—the people behind the herbarium specimens, the new species and combinations and the flora treatments. This book includes around 2,700 collectors that have collected herbarium specimens in the region arranged alphabetically. Each individual entry includes biographical data, including nationality, dates of birth and death, travels, publications, eponymy, publications and it lists the herbaria where specimens were deposited. The level of detail varies considerably from collector to collector with some briefly treated, whilst others are very detailed. For example, Bernard Verdcourt's entry is lengthy and includes location details of his 30 years of fieldwork, publication details of the flora treatments he compiled (a remarkable one-fifth of the flora...) and even an anecdote about meeting a lion on Ndi Hill!

Many entries also include portrait photographs but most are notably out-dated, but perhaps these show each botanist in their prime! The book also includes maps, abbreviations, acronyms and a time line of major events mentioned in the text, as well as numerous illustrations of regional eponymy, which makes the book easy on the eye and enjoyable to flick through. A similar book also published by Kew, *Plant Collectors in Madagascar and the Comoro Islands*, by Dorr (1997) included around a thousand collectors and for many entries included examples of the authors handwriting and many more anecdotes that could also have been good additions to *East African Plant Collectors*. There are also a few minor errors, for example grammatical and regarding publication authors and dates (e.g. p. 91 Eponymy. *Dorstenia christenhuszii* Chase, Kamau & Fay (2012)) which is not unusual in these kinds of comprehensive works, and forgivable considering the amount of work and time it takes to compile such a tome. It is without doubt the most thorough guide to plant collectors of a region in existence and, as the authors state in the introduction, has taken many years to compile and it is a credit to their perseverance for completing it. The authors also mention that they hope Kew colleagues take the project forward and continue to add new collectors in some form or another to keep the information up-to-date and dynamic, which would be a valuable resource if financial resources would allow this to continue.

Phytotaxa published several papers on plants from East Africa, notably many eponymies mentioned in the book (e.g. Vorontsova *et al.* 2010, Heatubun 2011, Chase *et al.* 2012), which makes this work of great interest to readers of the journal. In addition, modern plant taxonomists with an interest in the flora of East Africa will need this book for their work and it is highly recommended for any library keeping a collection on African history or general botany or natural history.

References

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