

Book review

Frank M. Dugan. The identification of fungi: an illustrated introduction with keys, glossary, and guide to literature., 176 pp. APS Press, St. Paul, Minnesota, USA. ISBN 0-89054-336-4. US\$65.

Many excellent introductory texts have appeared in recent years that give an overview of the range of fungal diversity, but a major gap in the literature up to the present has been something that would enable the enthusiastic beginner or novice to assign *any* fungus to an appropriate taxon. The last two decades have indeed seen the proliferation of excellent field guides, making it possible for a wide range of naturalists who are not mycologists to appreciate the diversity and importance of the larger fungi, but little attention has been devoted at this level to microfungi. This splendid volume amply remedies this deficiency, albeit somewhat more adequately for North American than European students. It will prove invaluable in undergraduate courses in mycology, and will be an immense help to the ever-increasing number of naturalists who need to tackle fungi at an adequate Phase 3 level in the preparation of Biodiversity Action Plans. These require consideration and evaluation of the biota in its entirety, and field guides can concentrate of necessity only on the larger fungi. This is especially relevant with the new focus being brought to bear on biodiversity with the implementation of the Biodiversity Convention and in particular with the obligation to draw up local action strategies and plans for biodiversity.

The drawings with which the text is abundantly illustrated are exemplary in their simplicity, and the clarity of their focus on exactly the features they are seeking to emphasise. They are in themselves a model for students on how such drawings should be made. The professional mycologist may consider many of the drawings to be simplistic rather than simple, but this may be because he has moved so far from the beginner's level he has lost sight of the importance of the difficulties encountered by the novice.

The book has an inevitable American emphasis. This detracts little from the general usefulness of the text, but there are surprising European omissions from the literature cited (even allowing for its necessary selectiveness): for example the splendid *Fungi of Northern Europe* series dealing with individual genera (such as Boertmans' *Hygrocybe* and Heilman-Clausen, Verbeken and Vesterholt's *Lactarius*), or the *Cortinarius*, *Flora Photographica* (Brandrud, Lindström, Marklund, Melot and Muskos).

The necessarily very superficial treatment possible for individual groups in a work of this modest size makes it unlikely that it will meet with the wholehearted approbation of the professional mycologist. This is a book for the beginner, providing an overview of the vast field of the fungi. It is not a reliable tool for tracking a fungus – even a large one – to generic level. The field mycologist may also be unimpressed because the book cannot be used to identify real fungi! However, it does not pretend to provide magic short-cuts in identification. It claims to be no more than a gateway, not a detailed route map.

One cannot help wishing for a future edition of the book that would also include colour photographs of the specimens from which the drawings were made. However, at \$65 the present volume is somewhat expensive for a book that could be printed for a fraction of the cost, and this puts it beyond the pocket resources of a large number of readers; however the ring binding and the clear line art of the figures will encourage widespread illegal photocopying!

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