



Jebb M, Crowley C. 2013. *Secrets of the Irish Landscape*. Cork University Press, 244 pp. ISBN 978-178-2050-10-0. Price: EUR 29.

If you are planning a trip to Ireland and want to be well prepared on arrival, or if you have a general interest in this area, this book is an excellent choice. It is beautifully produced and most colourful with marvellous photographs. *Secrets of the Irish Landscape* is actually a companion to a television series of the same title. The book examines the history of the Irish landscape since the last Ice Age until now. The whole island of Ireland is decoded in every aspect of its making, from geology and weather to every bio factor including human and historical. It tells the story of Ireland – how it was hewn by millions of tons of ice, and how it evolved into the green and vibrant land of today. It is a story told by a series of 23 experts in dedicated chapters, 24 in all, each eloquently portraying a fascinating topic with illustrations fascinating in their variety. The titles of the chapters already show the spectrum of topics covered, to mention a few: Ireland Under Ice, In Search of the Origins of Ireland's Arctic and Mediterranean Plants, The arrival of the first forests, Céide Fields: Europe's oldest surviving Dairy Fields, Irish Dendrochronology and the end of the Neolithic, The impact of the potato on the Irish landscape, Famine and Landscape. Moulded by incredible geological forces, carved out by millions of tons of ice and, comparatively recently, shaped by the equally inexorable influence of man, the Irish landscape is the foundation on which all of Ireland's wildlife and biodiversity sits. The book charts life's re-colonization of Ireland from when the ice receded at the end of the last ice age through to the present day. It explores how the ice sheet re-shaped the landscape, and how the early bacteria and lichen colonized the rocky substrate, ultimately creating the soil that allowed other plants to take hold. For instance, it is explained that Ireland is home to several plant species that don't occur anywhere else in Northern Europe – plants that are more commonly associated with the Mediterranean or the Atlantic coasts of Spain and Portugal (e.g. the Strawberry tree *Arbutus unedo*, missing from the native flora of Britain, whereas evidence indicates it has been in Ireland for at least 3 000 years) – growing here alongside species more usually at home in the Arctic tundra (e.g. the Arctic saxifrage *Saxifraga nivalis*, growing among an assemblage of arctic and alpine oddities, itself being one of the rarest plants of Ireland after a steady decrease since the late 1800s). Any first-time European botanist would be both confused and startled by the mixture of plant types in the West of Ireland. The pools from which grow American Pipewort *Eriocaulon aquaticum* and Water Lobelia *Lobelia dortmanna*, are fringed by Spanish heathers *Erica lusitânica*, while the rocky knolls over which Siberian Juniper *Juniperus sibirica* straggles are also abode to two Pyrenean plants; St. Dabeoc's heath *Daboecia cantabrica* and St Patrick's-cabbage *Saxifraga spathularis*. In the limestone wilderness of the Burren of northern County Clare, the generally rare Dense-flowered Orchid *Neotinea maculata*, far from its Mediterranean home, sends up its flower spikes through carpets of the Arctic alpine Mountain Avens *Dryas octopetala*. Ever since this seemingly flora of contradictions was revealed, botanists have argued as to how it came about in this cool but mild, wet climate, and only now do we have the tools that allow us to begin to unravel that history. The chapter on this matter nicely explains the use of both traditional information (like pollen) as well as present DNA data to reconstruct the biogeographic origin of the Irish

plant species and their migration to Ireland, also discussing that we are just about to begin to understand a little of this matter. *Secrets of the Irish Landscape* also celebrates the life of Robert Lloyd Praeger and the Clare Island survey which was completed in 1913 – so this is its centenary year. In 1895 Robert Lloyd Praeger began a pilgrimage across Ireland that was to last five years. His aim was to chart the distribution of all plants across the country. Praeger pondered the questions of where had the flora of Ireland come from. Inspired by Praeger a group of experts have come together to unravel the true enigma surrounding Ireland's unique and stunning ecosystem, and bring together their recent findings using new techniques and methods. The latest scientific theories are used to bring readers up-to-date on the remarkable and until very recently little understood collection of Irish flora and fauna ecosystem, which is not only unique in terms of Ireland and Britain but also in Europe. Highly recommended!

MARCO ROOS

Manilal KS. 2012. *Hortus Malabaricus and the Socio-Cultural Heritage of India*. Indian Association of Plant Taxonomy, Calicut, Kerala, India. 328 pp., illustrations. ISBN 81-901637-3-6. Price: Rs 700.00 (hard cover, to be ordered from iaatsecy@gmail.com).

The 12 volumes *Hortus Malabaricus*, authored or rather 'organized' by Hendrik Adriaan van R(h)eede tot Drakenstein is one of the most important works in early tropical botany published within the short timeframe of 15 years from 1668–1693 and treating 742 plant taxa, most of them used in traditional Malabar medicine. Nobody has done more to promote its fame than Professor K.S. Manilal from Calicut, Kerala (~Malabar). His earliest papers on the subject date from 1978, in 1994 he co-authored the classical taxonomic interpretation of all taxa described in *Hortus Malabaricus* with Dan Nicholson as senior author (*Regnum Vegetabile* 119), and most significantly of all in 2003 he published his complete English translation, followed in 2008 by a translation into Malayalam, thereby significantly providing more open access to this rich source of information published originally in Latin. The Indian journal of Plant Taxonomy *Rheedea* was initiated by Manilal in 1991, and he has been its Editor-in-Chief ever since. Over thirty years of preoccupation with *Hortus Malabaricus* and Van Rheedee has not diminished Manilal's enthusiasm for them. The present book is a bouquet of papers, some published elsewhere before, all related with the origins and significance of *Hortus Malabaricus*. In a logical sequence the European knowledge in the 16th and 17th century of the botanical wealth of Malabar is reviewed, before the huge contributions by Van Rheedee's team is discussed. The impact of the *Hortus Malabaricus* on Linnaeus's *Species Plantarum* of 1753 was considerable, because Linnaeus happily used the fine engravings as a basis (iconotypes *avant la lettre*) for many of his tropical species. The role of several major players in the cleverly orchestrated teamwork that gave rise to the *Hortus* is traced, giving interesting new insights. Thus the role of the Discalced Carmelite priest Mathew of St. Joseph and the Konkani Brahmins in providing information on the medicinal uses of the plants appears to have been limited, while that of Itty Achuden, a local pre-ayurvedic medical practitioner is all-pervasive. This was probably an indirect effect of Paul Hermann seriously criticizing the whole project in its early

phase during his visit to Kerala. Due attention is also given to the role of the Dutch scholars, who heavily edited the botanical descriptions in the twelve volumes before their publication in Amsterdam. Full listings are given of all plant species treated in *Hortus Malabaricus*, together with a very useful separate table of all 554 medicinal plants together with their – then perceived – curative powers. Manilal emphasizes many times the great present day significance of *Hortus Malabaricus*, because it is the only surviving documentation of traditional plant use in the highly sophisticated medical practice of western India, the old palm leaf manuscripts with medical recipes having been irretrievably lost.

Apart from these main topics, there are delightful biohistorical sideline chapters, for instance on the painter Gerard Lairesse of the original frontispiece, on the spelling of Rheede's name (during his lifetime 14 spelling variants were around), different numerals and numerical systems appearing the *Hortus Malabaricus* challenging Dutch printers, and on the two Hungarian

theologians who wrote poems praising medical doctor Abraham van Poot, botanical editor of volume 9. The chapter 'on the trail of the Rheedean specimens' reads like an adventure, but alas ends in blind alleys only: no herbarium specimens appear to be surviving – a fate shared with Rumphius's botanical collections that were at the basis of his, written in the same decades as Van Rheede's.

In 2012 Prof. Manilal was made an Officer of the Order of Oranje-Nassau by Queen Beatrix of The Netherlands, a well-deserved high honour for the scholar who has done so much to highlight the benefits of the Indian Dutch collaboration and synergism in a period when tropical botany elsewhere was often tainted with colonial abuse. The present book is a very welcome addition to earlier scholarly publications on Van Rheede's, and a very good read on tropical botany as viewed by an outstanding, modern botanist, resident of the Malabar Coast himself.

PIETER BAAS