

REVIEW

B. A. LEWIS & P. J. CRIBB: *Orchids of the Solomon Islands and Bougainville*. Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, 1991, IX + 335 pp., 80 full-page line drawings, 16 colour plates each showing 5 or 6 species. Paperback. Price £19.50.

This revision of all the orchid species so far recorded from the Solomon Islands and Bougainville (285 species belonging to 87 genera) has a similar layout as the previously published 'Orchids of Vanuatu' by the same authors. A short introduction is given to the topography, geology, vegetation, as well as the history of the botanical exploration of the area covered. The account of the species itself is written in a 'standard' Flora-style: a key to the genera, keys to the species of each genus, synonyms to the accepted species names, descriptions of the species, etcetera. Numerous full-page line drawings clearly depict diagnostically important parts of about half of the species, sixteen colour plates of high quality give an impression of their beauty.

The identification of the orchids of the satellite archipelagos of New Guinea is riddled with problems. The work of Schlechter and J. J. Smith on the 2000 or so orchid species occurring in New Guinea itself is heavily outdated now. The species are often based on a single, or very few specimens, too few to gain an insight in the variability that many species appear to display. Besides, a proper interpretation of these species is difficult in many cases, because numerous type specimens did not survive the world war II. To discourage orchid taxonomists further, a number of species show morphological clines towards the satellite islands around New Guinea, making the identification of material from these satellites still more difficult. The easiest way out of this quagmire is to describe all taxa as new species which cannot be identified unambiguously. However, in the long run this does not solve anything.

The authors have very scrupulously dealt with these problems. They have chosen to unite their species with New Guinea taxa as much as possible, and only in very clear-cut cases to describe new species. This way they may leave a number of problems unsolved, but at least they do not increase the existing chaos by adding more names. Their restraint to introduce numerous ill-defined new species could serve as an example in the world of orchid taxonomy.

A few minor comments: firstly, when identifying the genus *Mischobulbum* with the key to the genera the user may go the wrong way in question 7: *Mischobulbum* certainly has solitary leaves, in the sense that each shoot bears only one single leaf. Secondly, the colour plates are beautiful, but I prefer to leave a small strip of white between the photographs.

An excellent local flora and highly recommended. More of such orchid floras are needed. Lewis and Cribb started with Vanuatu, and have taken a large step towards New Guinea with this volume. What will come next?

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