

## F L O R A E U R O P A E A

De Redactie van de Flora Europaea zond ons over deze flora de volgende uiteenzetting, die voorkomt in The Times van 2 nov. 1957. Wij brengen dit artikel gaarne onder de aandacht van de lezers:

"Botany affects man's interests at so many points that much more than purely scientific interest attaches to a vast botanical project that is now getting actively under way. This is the publication of a flora of Europe, to contain descriptions - usually of not more than 50 words each - of all the flowering plants and ferns that grow spontaneously in the continent. It had at first been intended not to include European Russia (since it was covered by the new flora of the U.S.S.R.), but it has now been decided to do so, and the decision is clearly right, even though it will mean adding about 1,500 species to the book - which may now be expected to include some 16,000 or 17,000 kinds of plant. This will be not only a new and up-to-date work but, in effect, one of a new sort - the first modern flora of any whole continent (not merely of Europe) ever to be published - though there are in course of production several floras on a wide regional basis, as of Malaysia, or eastern or western tropical Africa."

"In the past, the listing and describing of wild plants has nearly always been upon an basis of political geography. The floras, where they have appeared, have usually been national floras - with only occasional attempts to cover wider, more natural, geographical areas. Europe is a continent of many, and often chang-

ing, national frontiers, and anyone who wishes to study a particular European plant might have to consult up to 100 books (apart from countless periodicals) written in many different languages (such a collection indeed, as scarcely exists outside a very few of the richest European scientific libraries) even to discover so elementary a fact as in what European countries the plant grows. There is, moreover, the consideration that there exist no adequate books on the plants of several of these countries."

"To select, synthesize, and summarize the information available on this wide field into a single treatise must obviously be a work of great labour and intricacy, demanding both effective central organization and carefully planned lines of communication with all the countries concerned, as well as a vast deal of research if the result is to be of value. Yet, evident though the difficulties are, the need for such a work has long been recognized. It was voiced again at the Botanical Congress at Paris in 1954, and, at the end of 1955, an informal committee of British and Irish botanists (which first met in January, 1956) was formed to forward the project. As a result the organization now at work was established."

"The core of the matter is a central editorial and organizing committee of fewer than a dozen members (drawn from five universities) with Professor T.G. Tutin, of Leicester, as chairman, and Dr. V.H. Heywood, of Liverpool, as secretary. The committee has its operational headquarters in the Hartley Botanical Laboratories of the University of Liverpool. A small group of advisory editors includes the Director of Kew Gardens and the Keeper of Botany at the British Museum, and five eminent continental botanists. There are also, in each European country, one or two regional advisors whose task will be not so much to write the flora themselves as to be available for consultation and for the supply of local information to the specialists writing the various sections of the text. Already the degree of cooperation achieved is remarkable. The advantages of such a method are clear, for the book, though international in scope, appeal, and sources of material, will be produced and controlled from a single country, which happens to be England, everything being channelled through Dr. Heywood at Liverpool."

"An enterprise of this sort must take time, and the intention is that the flora, in three or four volumes, amounting in all to perhaps 4,000 pages, shall be compiled over 15 years, and shall appear volume by volume, the first to be published in about five years from now. It is also likely to take a great deal of money, not merely for the cost of printing and publication, but also for the preliminary technical and administrative expenses, and the heavy research which is essential. On the first of these two points - no publisher has yet been ar-

ranged, but one of the leading university presses is interested in the project, as a commercial proposition, and so is an important publishing company: the committee, therefore, has no doubts about publication. As to what may be called costs of organization and compilation - nearly all the committee members and advisers already have heavy university duties, but (as scholars so often do) they are giving their services free to this project; nevertheless the necessary employment of trained secretaries and research workers must add greatly to the cost, which may be several thousand pounds a year. The work is even now in progress, the Royal Society has already made a small grant for special purposes, and arrangements are being made to provide for the expenditure involved."

"Obviously a flora of this size cannot deal with all aspects of the subject. Broadly speaking, in non-technical language, it will describe (family by family, genus by genus) every European species of flowering plant or fern, with keys (based on the well-known method eliminating sequences of paired contrasting characters) for identifying both genus and species. For each species there is a short summary of its geographical distribution, with precise indication of every country in which it is found. There will be no illustrations. There will be no vernacular names, either, since a moment's thought will show that, because of the number of languages in Europe, they would add immensely to the length of the text."

"Yet even within these strict limits very many problems have arisen. Were hybrids to be included? Was it possible to describe in a word or two the type of place in which a species grows, when this may vary immensely from country to country, and in many places be very imperfectly recorded? Even more importantly, what sense should be given to the word "species"? This point, at least, is certainly easier to deal with than it would once have been; for example, it is now known that many kinds of plant have the faculty of producing seed vegetatively - that is by mere growth, and without sexual fertilization."

"This process - known as apomixis - can give rise to populations of plants, distinguishable from other populations by many small characters. Such populations have in the past very often been given specific names, but it is now realized that each of them is rather in the nature of one individual many times repeated than of a true species. These "apomictic species" will therefore be excluded."

"Not the least curious problem is that of language - on which a final decision has not yet been taken. The book will have a world-wide (not merely European) circulation; what is the best medium of communication between botanists of many tongues and upon all continents? To the organizers it seems that there are only two possible choices - Latin or English. Latin is still, in botany, an international tongue, at least in so far as that every description of a new plant must,

to be held valid, contain a diagnosis of its characters written in Latin. Yet how far can it be assumed, to-day, that the majority of those who will want to use the Flora Europaea will really know enough Latin to read it in that tongue? And, if Latin be rejected, it seems that English can, among living languages, claim the most widely spread understanding. The choice has not yet been made - indeed the sample pages which have been circulated are some in the one tongue and some in the other -- and opinions received are fairly evenly divided between the two. Possibly the book may appear first in English, with a Latin edition afterwards."

"Lastly, for whose benefit is this work intended? Its use to professional botanists, especially those (for example in America) who may want to know about the European plants but have no access to all the local floras of Europa, needs no stressing. But beyond them, there is a whole host of other persons who may wish to know about European plants and what countries they grow in. Agriculturists, foresters, gardeners, scientists in other subjects with botanical implications or contacts are among these. So too, at times, are archaeologists, folklorists, and art historians. For all these, and many others, an immensely valuable new summary of knowledge in one of the great realms of human study will be available when eventually the Flora Europaea stands upon the shelves of the world's libraries."

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