

BOOK REVIEW

Las Plantas y el Hombre: Memorias del Primer Simposio Ecuatoriano de Etnobotánica y Botánica Económica. Montserrat Ríos and Henrick Borgtoff Pederson (editors). Quito, Ecuador: Ediciones ABYA-YALA, 1991. Pp. xxiv, 437. No price given (paperback). ISBN 9978-99-002-X.

Ethnobotanists often lament the difficulty of finding out what transpired at conferences they have not attended; even when published, the proceedings are often out-of-date by the time they see the printed page. Ríos and Pederson are to be congratulated for their efficiency in issuing this compendium of papers presented at the First Ecuadorian Symposium of Ethnobotany and Economic Botany, held in Quito from 27 February–2 March, 1990.

The volume contains papers written by 45 contributors representing eight countries. Of a total of 33 articles, five are written in English and 28 in Spanish; abstracts are given in both languages. The papers are divided among three sections: (1) conservation and management of useful plants; (2) medicinal plants; and (3) ethnobotany and its application.

As with most symposium proceedings, the range of topics is diverse and the quality of the papers uneven. Many are based on research carried out in Ecuador, but some contributions describe projects in Mexico, Colombia, and other Latin American countries. Others range further afield; the inclusion of a paper on the potential use of Bedouin birth control plants to subdue the fecundity of rodents is especially curious.

Although most focus on the ethnobotany of particular species or indigenous groups, a number of papers are broad enough to be of general interest. Castillo T. gives an account of the primary plant genetic resources of Ecuador and discusses a local program for their conservation *ex situ*. Pederson, a Danish botanist with extensive experience in Ecuador, presents an informative summary of the nation's wild palms. Estrella, initiator of the symposium, describes the Ecuadorian food plants in use before the arrival of the Spanish. A well-written essay by Davis recaps the history of ethnobotany and describes its trajectory.

Several contributions are brief summaries of broad, ongoing research projects: country-wide inventories of medicinal plants in Mexico (Aguilar C.) and Honduras (House) and comparative ethnobotany in the northern sierra of Puebla, Mexico (Martinez A.), among others. One hopes that these "tip of the iceberg" accounts will soon be followed by monographic treatments.

The 22-page bibliography is particularly valuable for ethnobotanists who work in South America; many articles of limited distribution are included. Indices of scientific and vernacular names are useful for readers interested in folk classification or in a particular taxonomic group.

The book was copublished by the Herbario QCA, Departamento de Ciencias Biológicas, Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador, Quito, Ecuador. Inquiries should be addressed to the editors at this address.

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