

BOOK REVIEWS

Alkaloids: Chemical and Biological Prospectives. S. William Pelletier (Editor). New York: Springer-Verlag, 1992. Pp. xvi; 365.

This volume, number 8 in a series dedicated to that biologically most important series of secondary organic compounds, the alkaloids, has much of interest for ethnobiological research in curare, food of insect herbivores, synthesis of the medicinally interesting yohimbine alkaloids, and the loline group of pyrrolizidine alkaloids of interest as insect deterrents and cattle toxins in certain grasses infected with endophytic fungi.

Of very special ethnobotanic interest is chapter 1, an extraordinarily complete 150-page discussion of curares with a bibliography of 564 items, by the late authority on arrow poisons, Dr. Norman J. Bisset. It is divided into (1) Introduction; (2) Ethnographic Background; (3) Botany; (4) Chemistry; (5) Pharmacology; (6) Development of Modern Muscle Relaxants, and (7) Conclusion. It is the most up-to-date, whole-length and authoritative summary of what is now known from an interdisciplinary point of view that has ever been published. Arrow poisons of South and Central America, central Africa, and western Malaysia are considered. It should be available to specialists in many fields tangentially interested in any aspect of arrow poisons, but most certainly to ethnobotanists, botanists, chemists, pharmacologists, and anthropologists.

Richard Evans Schultes
Botanical Museum of Harvard University
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138