

THE FLORA OF NIGERIA

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When work was started on a flora of the vascular plants of Nigeria written from the point of view of a reader with little knowledge of botany, it was decided that the first section should deal with Gramineae. The Federal Department of Agriculture generously donated 500 pounds towards the cost of the illustrations. This section was printed and published in 1970 by the Ibadan University Press, Ibadan, Nigeria for the very modest selling price of nine shillings. A copy of the book accompanies this report. For technical reasons the illustrations have been bound separately from the text. This has the advantage that it will enable better plates to be substituted, or new ones added, without reprinting the text.

Subsequent sections will be published in the same form, the emphasis being on the rapid identification of plants in the field. The keys have been specially designed for this purpose, the aim being to sort out those taxa having similar sets of characters, particular attention being paid to choosing characters that can be observed without dissection or anything more complex than a ruler and a hand lens. The advantage of this type of key to the layman is that his attention is automatically drawn to groups that may be superficially like other taxa to which they are not related. Limitations of space, especially when dealing with large groups, often make it impossible to do this in ordinary dichotomous keys: all the characters on one side of the key cannot be repeated, or specifically rejected, on the other side. Consequently the layman, or even an experienced botanist, may mis-identify his specimen because he is uncertain whether it ought to possess a certain character or not.

It is hoped to have the manuscripts of Cyperaceae, Orchidaceae, and monocotyledonous herbs not dealt with elsewhere, completed by the end of 1971. Each will be of the same size as the book on Grasses.

Four sections are planned to cover trees and shrubs. As far as trees are concerned the text will be based on the book "Nigerian Trees" suitably abbreviated. It was originally intended that the shrubs should be treated separately but the present view of the Editorial Committee is that it is often difficult to make valid distinctions between shrubs and trees, especially in the case of saplings, and that it would be better to combine the two. Three sections will deal with forest trees and shrubs, and one with savanna trees and shrubs. Probably a minimum of five years from now will be required to complete these sections.

Climbing plants will require two sections. It is hoped that work on them will be concurrent with work on trees and shrubs and that the manuscript will be ready by the end of 1976.

Probably it will not be possible to start work on the dicotyledonous herbs, which will take up at least two sections, until all the sections mentioned above have been published, say by 1980. Various unconnected groups, however, including ferns, water plants, and cultivated exotics, may be written up earlier if authors happen to be available. As with all the plants to be included in the Flora of Nigeria, the essential work is observation of living material and descriptions are based on this rather than on herbarium material.

In future, so that a check may be made on the reliability of the work, each description will be accompanied by the citation of a verified specimen lodged with a herbarium of international repute, and each illustration will cite the specimen on which the drawing is based.

The approximate date of publication of the final volume is 1990.

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