

SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR AN ETHIOPIAN FLORA

M. G. GILBERT

The main aim of this presentation is to outline some of the factors that would have to be taken into consideration in the preparation of an Ethiopian Flora. A major factor is the time scale which in turn devolves into the question of how much should be sacrificed to achieve the publication of a flora within a reasonable period of time. The ideal flora would, without doubt, take a very long time, if it could be produced at all, so how can the content of a shorter work be decided on. An obvious way would be to reduce the number of species to be covered by restricting the area to be covered. A definitive flora of North Tropical East Africa, as defined by Kew, would include the Sudan, Ethiopia and the Somalias. Such a flora must be deferred as a desirable project for the future. Most authors, notably CUFODONTIS (1953—) and PICHI-SERMOLLI et al. (1953—) have accepted an area covering Ethiopia, Somalia and French Somaliland which would include something of the order of six and a half thousand species, some 35—40% of which would be endemic. Mr. Jan GILLETT suggests that a field flora of just part of this area has much to recommend it, especially if some of the drawbacks of a hastily produced and of necessity inaccurate flora of the full area are considered.

The most important is that such a flora, by its very existence, would make the production of a later edition more difficult — who gives funds for the rewriting of a flora that has just been completed? Also some parts of the area under consideration are particularly badly known, notably the Ogaden of south east Ethiopia and Somalia and the south west forests of Ethiopia and there is no immediate likelihood of this situation improving. Thus any account will, at some time in the future, be proven rather inadequate. By taking a more limited area these two problems can be by-passed. Such a flora would not preempt the production of a later more complete work and could be designed so as to avoid the more controversial areas. Mr. GILLETT suggests a Field Flora of the Ethiopian Highlands, taking the Ethiopian Plateau delimited possibly by the 1500 or 1800 m. contour. Such a flora has a further advantage in that it would include nearly all the major population centres of Ethiopia and hence would cover all the immediate problems in plant identification in biology teaching, agricultural and other field studies etc. A straight forward altitudinal delimitation does introduce problems, how many specimens have reliable altitudinal information? A possible

solution would be to draw up an arbitrary contour and then include and exclude specimens according to their horizontal distribution. Another important question that must be discussed is the format, how much information should be included? It is not however of paramount importance, especially should the aim be the production of a field flora as, for the sake of brevity, less information would have to be included than would have had to be gathered for the production of the accounts, changes could be made at a comparatively late in the proceedings. Perhaps the one prior point that must be settled is should the synoptic keys of Flora of West Tropical Africa be used as a model or should the short keys and descriptions of Flora Europaea or something between the two. Other considerations are the inclusion of distributions, specimen citations, ecological notes etc. Lastly comes the extremely important task of organising such work. Here the question of finance looms very large indeed, especially as, as yet, it is none existant so the first task of any committee or working party will be to draw up a working plan that can be used to persuade organisations to help with its completion.

Concluding I must acknowledge the fact that the ideas presented here are the product of quite a considerable amount of conversation and correspondence with several other people, I hope that I have not misrepresented them too badly.

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Autor(en)/Author(s): Gilbert M.G.

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