

**BOOK REVIEW : EDGAR, E., CONNOR, H.E. 2000: FLORA OF NEW ZEALAND VOL. V,
GRAMINEAE (includes contributions by W.R. Sykes and M.I. Dawson), 650 pp.**

Manaaki Whenua Press, Lincoln.

This long-awaited book, which deals with one large family of monocotyledon plants, contains vital information on the identity and classification of the New Zealand grasses; native (188 species) and naturalised (226 species). It is the last to emerge of the standard floras for New Zealand vascular plants and is a great milestone. In the last 60 years or so, lacking a comprehensive flora, it has been very difficult for botanists here to keep track of progress on taxonomy of the group. That difficulty is now past. Once the terminology that covers the particular structures present in the grasses is learnt, identification of any grass in the country should be possible. The book is also a mine of information on the overall nature of grasses.

The preface is very helpful because it explains exactly how the authors have approached their task (and includes references to sources). Many other useful facts are provided, e.g. on endemic grasses; conservation status of threatened taxa; weedy properties of naturalised species. There are special notes on reproductive biology of grasses and a continuation of the “Annals of Taxonomic Research” on indigenous New Zealand seed plants, up to 1996, with a subject index to the families covered.

Synopses and keys often use vegetative characters of the species concerned. The descriptions are terse, but very informative, with considerable information on foliage as well as flowers and fruit. Sections on large indigenous genera such as *Chionochloa* contain references to reproductive biology, cytology and chemotaxonomy. The illustrations include 24 line drawings; 10 well chosen colour photographs of habitats, some species and their characters; and 16 paintings of *Rytidosperma* florets (respectively by Sabrina Malcolm, Peter Johnson and Keith West).

The waiting was worth it. Careful, patient work is evident. Quite apart from the fine scholarship which has so evidently gone into the preparation of this book, it is an excellent example of its kind, which presents its subject very clearly. The type size is big enough for aging eyes and the paper is thick enough to allow a quick leaf through. Hearty congratulations to our friends Elizabeth Edgar and Henry Connor. We can enjoy the hints of whimsy in the preface – something not often seen in a flora!

Colin Burrows