

REVIEW

Grasses of Malaya

GILLILAND, H. B., *Grasses of Malaya*, VI+319 pages, with 67 figures, 22 partially coloured plates, and 36 photo plates. Singapore Government Printer (P.O. Box 485, Singapore); 1971. S\$30.

At last a highly useful and beautifully bound botanical treatise on Malayan grasses is available.

H. N. Ridley's monumental work, *Flora of the Malay Peninsula*, was published in 5 volumes nearly half a century ago. Since then much has been added to the knowledge of the Malayan flora. A project of writing a revised Flora of Malaya initiated in early 1950's, of which only the first two volumes, namely, *Orchids of Malaya* (1953) and *Ferns of Malaya* (1954), both by R. E. Holttum, came out many years ago and has gone through several editions. The present book, *Grasses of Malaya*, is listed as the third volume of this distinguished series.

Before the late Professor Gilliland left Singapore in 1965, a manuscript "composed of Keys and species descriptions..." was handed over to Mr. H. M. Burkill, former director of the Singapore Botanic Gardens. Professor Gilliland then returned to S. Africa where he passed away shortly afterwards. For several years, Mr. Burkill, besides performing his official duties as Director of the Gardens, took up the painstaking job of editing and revising the manuscript and brought it into the present form.

In the original Malayan flora, the grasses occurred only on the fringe of the tropical rain forests, and naturally they were rather poorly represented. After the opening and destruction of the forests, there followed the introduction (both intentionally and unintentionally) of new grasses into this part of the world. Thus it is justifiable and necessary to include a good many naturalized and cultivated grasses in the account.

Besides an informative introduction, this book consists of two parts. The first part, dealing with the bamboos, is mainly based on Dr. Holttum's work on Malayan bamboos; the second part, or the main part, dealing with grasses, follows the pattern set up by Dr. Bor's work on grasses of Burma, Ceylon, India and Pakistan. Since economically the grasses are probably of greater importance than any other family of plants, a brief summation of economic uses of many grass species contained in the work, mainly taken from I. H. Burkill's well-known Dictionary, adds much to the practical value of this book. All these are clearly acknowledged by the editor.

The main body of the book — The generic and species descriptions and the keys — is admirable. The descriptions are, in general, brief but to the point. And because of the careful selection of the most obvious characters, the keys are specially easy to work with.

The present writer, however, would like to suggest a few minor points for consideration of improvement in future editions.

1. Professor J. L. Audus' excellent drawings, 22 in all, partially coloured, certainly add much beauty and value to the book. It would, however, bring harmony and uniformity to the book if the scales of measurement of the drawings could be converted into the metric system.
2. Most of the text-figures are very good; only a few of them e.g. Fig. 31, on p. 161 and Fig. 51, on p. 233, probably should have been improved.
3. It should be better to indicate clearly the fresh material or herbarium specimens of which photographs were taken as reproduced in the plates at the end of the book, especially with regard to the collector and the collecting numbers where herbarium specimens were used.
4. In some cases (e.g. on pp. 18, 19 etc.), vernacular names are given immediately below the basynyms and synonyms and also in the same lettering. This could be very confusing. It would probably be better to transpose all vernacular names to the end of the description as is the practice of most authors.
5. Preferably, the reference on the grasses of Java by Backer (on p. 10) should be replaced by the excellent chapter on grasses (as "Poaceae") in the 3rd volume of *Flora of Java* (Pp. 495-641, 1968) by Backer and Bakhuizen. This was based on Backer's original manuscript and elaborated by Ch. Monod de Froideville.

This book will be a welcome and useful addition to any botanist's or agriculturist's working library.

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Keng, Hsuan. 1971. "Grasses of Malaya by Gilliland, H. B." *The Gardens' bulletin, Singapore* 25, 383–384.

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