

Scotland, which is greatly enhanced by lavish colour illustrations. The very evident enthusiasm of the authors for the areas which they cover has permitted the book to capture the excitement of ecological research and both amateur and professional will find much that is new and little that is dull.

T.H. CLUTTON-BROCK

Flora Europaea, Vol. 5, edited by T.G. Tutin *et al.* Cambridge UP, £37.50.

With the publication of this fifth volume one of the most important recent taxonomic projects has been completed. Anyone who needs to be able to name plants in Europe can be grateful to the team of authors who have put together this *magnum opus*. It is a relief to the professional botanist to be able to quote a source for nomenclature and taxonomy that will be accepted as standard by all other workers.

Volume 5 covers the whole of the Monocotyledons from Alismataceae to Orchidaceae. The gross taxonomy will not cause any surprises, but at the generic and specific levels the lumpers, splitters and name-droppers have been at work. I was certainly pleased to see *Scirpus* re-embrace *Bolboschoenus*, *Holoschoenus*, *Isolepis*, *Schoenoplectus*, and *Trichophorum*. In the Gramineae, however, the nomenclature caused me some problems. The genus *Festuca* is a minefield for unwary botanists, but using *Flora Europaea* I was not wholly able to sort out the nomenclature of what used to be *F. cinerea* and *F. glauca*, and the lists of synonyms provided do not seem to be sufficiently comprehensive.

Perhaps the authors can be forgiven for leaving *Festuca* as complex as its biological reality, but a few pages further came a greater shock. At first I thought the genus *Leymus* was an improbable misprint for *Elymus*, but *E. arenarius* has in fact become *L. arenarius*. The genus *Elymus* still exists and it contains all the familiar species of *Agropyron* – that genus now comprises a few species in central Asia!

Clearly any new flora will bring forward nomenclatural changes like this, and doubtless contemporaries castigated Bentham and Hooker for the same reason. Gradually the new names will come to be accepted (or will they? – I have to confess to still using the old ‘unsplit’ genus *Lycopodium*, and Volume 1 appeared in 1964), but when one bears in mind the necessary element of artificiality in any system of biological classification, changes such as those in *Agropyron* and *Elymus* require powerful justification. I fear it will still be *Agropyron repens* that I dig up from my garden for a few years yet.

Nevertheless, as a whole *Flora Europaea* has been characterised by nomenclatural restraint and has proved taxonomically robust. It has stimulated much valuable taxonomic research and radically altered our conception of the flora of Europe. Reference works can become standards either because so little is known about the field that the mere existence of the work gives it a necessary authority, or because the treatment is so exhaustive that it can be relied upon to be accurate. *Flora Europaea* fits the second category.

A.H. FITTER

The Private Life of the Otter, by Philip Wayre. Batsford, £4.95.

The meat of this book is in the delightful and informative first six chapters on the otter’s natural history. They provide a unique insight into the otter’s private life and are illustrated with the author’s excellent photographs. The book’s title is misleading, however, since three chapters are largely devoted to the otter’s public life at the Otter Trust – which is interesting enough, but not without padding; for example, a detailed account of exactly how the otter pens at the Otter Trust are constructed.

The chapter on otter conservation is notable for its omissions rather than its content. On page 81 Philip Wayre says ‘it is to the landowner that we must look for the survival of the otter over large areas of Britain’, and yet there is no mention of the county