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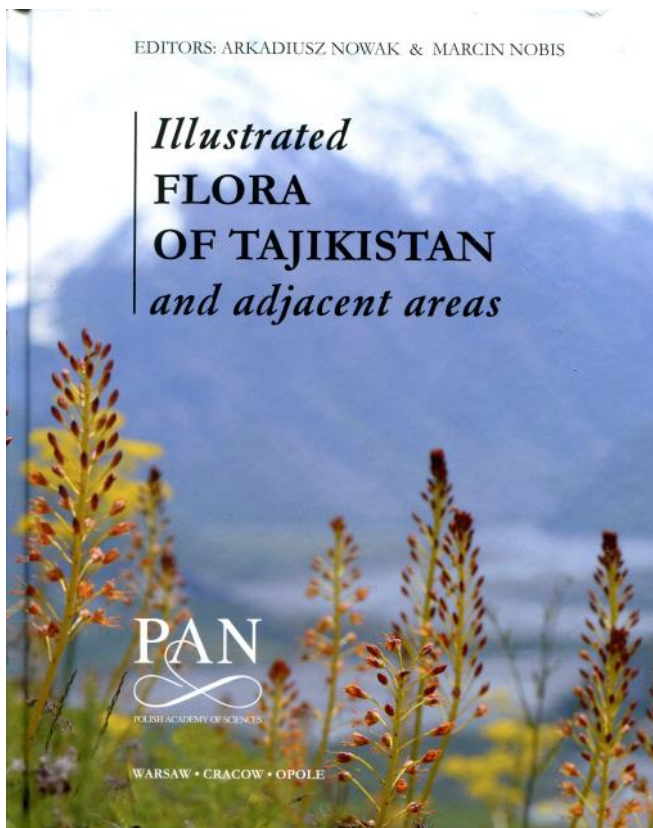
Book Review

Nowak, A., Nobis, M., Nowak, S., Nobis, A., Wróbel, A., Świerszcz, S., Klichowska, E. Dembicz, I. & Kusza, G. 2020. Illustrated flora of Tajikistan and adjacent areas. – 766 pp., Polish Academy of Sciences, Botanical Garden, Center for Biological Diversity Conservation, Warsaw, Cracow and Opole. ISBN 978-83-938900-5-7 (print) and 978-83-938900-6-4 (online).

Last autumn, I was surprised to find a heavy parcel from Poland in my mailbox. I opened it and found a roughly A4 size, 2.5 kg heavy hardcover book with a beautiful photo on the cover. It describes the vascular plant flora of the Middle Asian country Tajikistan, which is botanically-rich (4,300 species) and particularly rich in endemics (35%), despite the relatively small size of the country that covers only 143,000 km².

The main part of the book (673 pp.) is the “Catalogue of plants”, which sounds much more banal than it is. In reality, it is a photographic guide to 1,864 species (including some from adjacent areas of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan). The species are arranged alphabetically within alphabetically ordered families (thus ferns, gymnosperms and angiosperms are mixed), sometimes interspersed by impressive double-page photographs visualising typical Tajik plant communities in splendid landscape settings. Each page presents three species, each with one to four photos, covering the outer half of the page. The inner half contains the name, any synonyms, red list status, a distribution map plus short descriptions covering the categories “Phytogeographical element”, “Habitat”, “Elevational range”, “Flowering period”, “Remarks” (with relevant (differential) characters) and sometimes “Usefulness”. The selection of species is quite balanced and less photogenic families such as the *Poaceae* are also well represented. The quality of the photographs is mostly good and, in addition to the whole plant, details of flowers, fruits, leaf bases etc. are often visualised.

Apart from the “Catalogue”, the book also contains a 58-page introductory section and a 5-page glossary of botanical terms. The introductory part greatly enhances the value of the book as it contains, among other topics, an overview of the physical geography, a brief history of the botanical exploration of the country, a detailed analysis of patterns of endemism (across regions and families) and, finally, an overview of the vegetation types of the country (30 pages). This text is accompanied by many helpful photographs.



While it emerges that Tajikistan is a grassland country, ranging from the pseudosteppes of the lowlands via numerous types of steppes to the alpine grasslands at up to 4,000 m a.s.l., there are also some forests, shrublands and wetlands.

After this appraisal, the best part of the story is still missing: The book is gold open access! You can find it in Research Gate (<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/344948625>) and freely download a good resolution pdf of more than 200 MB. However, those who love real books can also order a free copy from the publisher (Secretariat of the Botanical Garden of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Powsin: ob.sekr@obpan.pl) as long as there are copies remaining from the original circulation figure of 1,000. You will only have to pay shipping costs (e.g. in Poland: 20 PLN, Germany: 64 PLN, UK: 93 PLN). I will use the real book at home, and hopefully, the pdf on a future field excursion to Middle Asia. A thousand thanks to the author and publishers for this generous arrangement!

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