

BOOK REVIEW

THE LIVERWORTS, MOSSES AND FERNS OF EUROPE, BY WOLFGANG FREY (HORNWORTS AND LIVERWORTS), JAN-PETER FRAHM (MOSSES), EBERHARD FISCHER AND WOLFRAM LOBIN (FERNS AND FERN-ALLIES). Translated and updated by the authors with illustrations prepared by H. Lunser (Bryophytes) and E. Fischer (Ferns). Harley Books. English edition revised and edited by T.L.Blockeel .2006. 512pp.(ferns and former fern allies pp.363-455), 166 figs, each incorporating numerous line drawings (ferns and former fern allies figs. 121-166). 218 X 155mm, hardback. ISBN 0 946589 70 4. £45. German edition first published 1995.

Wide ranging titles such as this usually mean a book will be a 'Jack of all subjects' and master of none, so you can imagine the pleasant surprise I had on dipping into it. Ferns are indeed a relatively minor part filling fewer than 100 pages but the coverage is more comprehensive than given in many field handbooks.

Apart from a couple of prefaces there are no introductory chapters. The books start straight away with the dichotomous keys. At the end there is a glossary and bibliography.

None but the most well read specialist will be familiar with all the taxa described here. Recently discovered species and subspecies are included. There are no lengthy field notes, details are precise and to the point. Most species are covered with fewer than four lines of text. Distribution is given by country or island within Europe and more briefly outside of Europe. As with the rest of the book the entire fern section is a generously annotated dichotomous key. The key is supported by many line drawings which work well for the well defined species but by the time you get down to the really critical taxa they are not so helpful. I looked long and hard at one sketch of the base of the lowermost pinna of *Gymnocarpium robertianum* but I still cannot work it out!

The fern tourist venturing anywhere in Europe, be it the Azores, Crete, Cape Verde, Madiera, Russia or closer to home will find all the local fern species covered. A few hybrids are also mentioned although the criteria for their inclusion is obscure to me. For example the very rare *Asplenium x heufleri* is in the key but many others, such as *A. x sarniense*, are not.

I can think of no other up to date book covering all the ferns of Europe. Remy Prelli's *Les fougères et plantes alliées de France et d'Europe occidentale* has a more restricted range. Where the two overlap I suggest the Prelli book will be the more user friendly even though it is in French. For full coverage of Europe in one go, however, this guide is a useful volume.

Martin Rickard