

BOOK REVIEW

Ferns, Clubmosses, Quillworts and Horsetails of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. **Murphy, R.J., Page, C.N., Parslow, R.E. & Bernallick, I.J. 2012.** Softback, 201pp., ISBN 978-1-902864-07-5. Environmental Records Centre for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly (ERCCIS), Truro. £20.00

After a gestation period that would have worried an elephant's obstetrician, it was with as much a sense of relief as delight when this attractive treatment of the far south-west's ferns and allies finally arrived. Within the British Isles, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly have a remarkably rich and varied fern flora, with a range of alien species that have escaped from the long-established gardens for which the region is renowned, and natives such as the Mediterranean *Isoetes hystrix* and *Ophioglossum lusitanicum* unique to this area in the British Isles. Covering over 70 ferns, clubmosses, quillworts and horsetails, their subspecies, varieties and hybrids, both native and introduced, this book, rather like *Welsh Ferns* (Hutchinson & Thomas, 1996) before it, therefore has a broader applicability than its title might suggest.

The major part of the book consists of illustrated taxon accounts: each has a short description of the plant where relevant; the distribution in Europe (including the British Isles); and habitats and distribution in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. Maps show distribution by a 2km x 2km square (tetrad) basis in Cornwall, and at a finer resolution (by six-figure grid references) in the Isles of Scilly. The introduction briefly covers the various habitats in Cornwall, the climate, soils and geology and the effects of such activities as mining and china clay workings, and the special conditions on the Isles of Scilly.

The A4 format chosen allows space for the maps to be presented at a good size, along with the many very nice photographs of plant details and habit which make this volume both attractive and useful. The nomenclature and taxonomy are commendably up to date, the only contentious area being the treatment of *Pteridium*, where this author would rather see the subspecies given presented as ecotypes. Even so by presenting these in this fashion more people will become aware of them and our understanding of them can only be improved. The only other observation I would make relates to the account of *Cystopteris fragilis*. All the material that I have seen from Penjerrick is of *C. diaphana* and the status of *C. fragilis* as Cornish, as the text makes clear, is questionable.

This well-produced and very accessible book will, I am sure, do much to encourage an interest in ferns and allied plants and, I hope, may spawn similar regional treatments from elsewhere - it certainly provides a very good model to follow. I warmly recommend it.

REFERENCES

HUTCHINSON, G. & THOMAS, B.A. 1996. *Welsh Ferns*, 7th Ed. Cardiff: National Museums and Galleries of Wales.

Fred Rumsey