

### The Fern Gazette

(Ed: J.M. Camus & J.A. Crabbe).  
Vol.16, Parts 1 & 2, 2000  
The British Pteridological Society,  
London, 124 pp.

This issue is of interest to us here in Trinidad and Tobago because it commemorates the 80th birthday of C. Dennis Adams and contains a checklist of the pteridophytes of Trinidad and Tobago.

We are not told the actual date of Adams's birthday, but that does not matter much. What matters is that his contributions to botany are being recognised. Dennis saw service in World War II, later studied at King's College, London, where he obtained a Ph.D. in botany, and then went off to Africa as lecturer in botany at the University of the Gold Coast (as it was then). In 1959 he came to the West Indies, and remained here until retirement in September 1980, first at The University of the West Indies in Mona and then at St. Augustine from 1976 to 1980. After retirement he was accommodated at The Natural History Museum, London, where he left off lecturing for a whole new life of research and writing. All of this is documented in four short articles by three current members of the museum and one by our own E. Julian Duncan.

These articles can be read with pleasure by anyone with the slightest interest in botany. Not so the remainder of the issue, the checklist of pteridophytes (ferns and their allies) of Trinidad and Tobago by Yasmin Baksh-Comeau. The introduction is straightforward enough - a history of collecting - with maps of the islands showing the most important sites. As to the rest of the checklist I can best give an idea of its "flavour" by quoting the first entry verbatim.

### PSILOTACEAE

**Psilotum nudum** (L.) P. Beauv., Prodr. Aetheogam. 106. 112. 1805. *Bernhardia antillarum* K. Muller, Bot. Zeit. 14: 234. 1856. Syntypes: Jamaica, Martinique, Trinidad.

*Lycopodium nudum* L., Sp. Pl. 1100. 1753. Lectotype (designated by Proctor, 1977): 'in Indiis', *Anon.* (LINN 1257.1).

Habitat: Occasional: epiphyte and on stumps and logs, and in crevices of old masonry, cliffs or plant pots (-30-m).

Material examined: TRINIDAD. without locality, *Homersley s.n.* in 1924 (TRIN 34308), *Homersley 310* (BM); Salibea-Matura Trace, *Baksh 747* (TRIN 28151)

Distribution: tropics and subtropics generally.

There are over three hundred entries like this one taking up 103 pages. There are no descriptions, no keys, no illustrations. If you do not know what the abbreviations stand for, if you do not know what is a lectotype or a syntype (neither of which I could find in my new Chambers Dictionary, though I did find holotype) then this publication is not for you. Except in special circumstances, it will not help you to identify a fern you have found, though it does give answers to certain questions, which we will get back to later.

If, on the other hand, you do know what all the abbreviations stand for, and you do know what is a lectotype and a syntype, then you are either a professional botanist or a very enthusiastic amateur with some knowledge of plant taxonomy, and this publication is for you. You should welcome it; it is the result of a detailed, scholarly examination of all the collections in our National Herbarium and those of the Natural History Museum, London, Kew Gardens, and major museums in North America. It provides, for the first time, a list that is as reliable as anyone can make it, and is a firm foundation for further studies of

pteridophytes in our islands. It is sure to enhance the reputation of its author.

So, now to the "special circumstances" and the kind of questions the list can answer. As is clear from the entry quoted above, information is given on habitat and distribution for each species. Sometimes this can be put to good use. For instance, if you are a pteridologist of sufficient experience to recognise a *Pecluma* when you see one, and turn to this publication for help in determining the species, you are in luck. There are only two species and one grows at elevations of 10-20 metres and the other at 180-600 metres. If you try the same method with an *Acrostichum* you are unlucky; there are only two species but they both grow in the same type of habitat.

How many species of *Selaginella* do we have? When I was a student at St. Mary's College in the early 1940s, Fr. Graf, who taught us botany opined that there may be as many as twenty. Now I can say with confidence that thirteen species are known from Trinidad and four from Tobago. Three of the thirteen were introduced and have become naturalised. Suppose I find *Lindsaea lancea* in the Aripo Savannas and I ask "Does it grow elsewhere?" The checklist answers, "Yes," and gives other localities. "Do other *Lindsaea* species grow in the Aripo Savannas?" "Yes, two more." "Do any ferns grow in the dry habitat of Chacachacare?" I know one does because I found a *Lygodium* there, many years ago. I look up the checklist and find that *Lygodium venustum* is listed for Chacachacare. "Are there other species besides this one?" The answer is there in the checklist, but you will have to find it for yourself. "Are there any endemic species?" I make a quick search and find *Asplenium oroupouchense* listed as "Endemic to Trinidad." I also find just below this entry *Asplenium papyraceum* which strange terminology designates a hybrid, which in this case the checklist tells us is a "sterile triploid hybrid with 123 chromosomes and irregular meiosis." More searching turns up more endemics and more hybrids.

You will not find this publication in bookshops. To get a copy you will have to contact the publisher, The British Pteridological Society, Department of Botany, The Natural History Museum, London SW7 5BD, U.K.

Victor C. Quesnel