

Flowers of Trinidad and Tobago

Julian Kenny

Prospect Press, Maraval, Trinidad and Tobago. 2005. 140 p.
ISBN 976-95057-8-1

At first sight “Flowers of Trinidad and Tobago” by Professor Emeritus Julian Kenny looks like a coffee table book, full of pretty photographs for visitors to browse through while their hosts attend to a domestic emergency. However, those who read the text very soon realise that this is a serious, if succinct, scientific overview of a wide variety of both native and introduced flowering plants of Trinidad and Tobago, albeit for the amateur naturalist.

Touching briefly on the uses man has made of flowers in religious ceremonies, Professor Kenny begins by posing the question “What is a flower?” and proceeds to answer it himself by describing the evolution of flowering plants in a few short sentences and giving the reader an introduction into basic floral anatomy, stressing the reproductive function of every flower.

The second chapter gives the reader some idea of the wealth of flowering plants, from the tallest trees to the smallest herb, to be found in Trinidad and Tobago. Each of the next seven chapters highlights a particular habitat – or rather, habitats, since in the chapter headed “forests” habitats range from swamp to elfin forests, each with very different species demanding specialised ecosystems for survival.

Streams and rivers, wetlands, savannas and the dramatic variety of coastal habitats (from the sun, sea and sands of Tobago to the mangrove swamps of Trinidad) and flowering plants to be found in these locations are the subjects of the next four chapters. Apart from the flowering plants, these chapters include information on the geology and micro-climates preferred by the flora in each habitat.

Agriculture, the eighth chapter, has had the greatest impact on ecosystems and consequently, the flowering

plants growing in these disturbed areas, and secondary growth forest. Professor Kenny touches very briefly on the barren (where flowering plants are concerned) landscapes of sugar cane and rice-growing, contrasting them with plantations of citrus, cocoa and coffee that provide an ideal ecosystem for shade-loving plants.

Man-made habitats conclude the survey of ecosystems in this book. Perhaps the greatest surprise is the diversity of flowering plants to be found around landfills. Given some rain and allowed to settle without further disturbance, seeds of flowers transported with the material germinate, grow and flower on land filled for housing or industry.

As one would expect from any serious work on flora, the last four sections of the book are headed, respectively: bibliography, appendix– families, glossary, and index to species.

The illustrations are lavish; texts accompanying each photographed flower note the scientific name, common name, family, times of flowering and where it can be found.

Photographers will be interested in Professor Kenny’s notes on digital photography in the Preface, in which he stresses that his book “is NOT a guide to identification.” That “It simply seeks to illustrate the remarkable diversity and beauty of floral form in a tiny fraction of Trinidad and Tobago’s plant life.”

There’s no doubt in the minds of those who have already read this book that he has succeeded in making the wider public aware of the wealth of beauty in the flowering plants – and where to find them.

Anne Hilton

E-mail: ahilton@carib-link.net