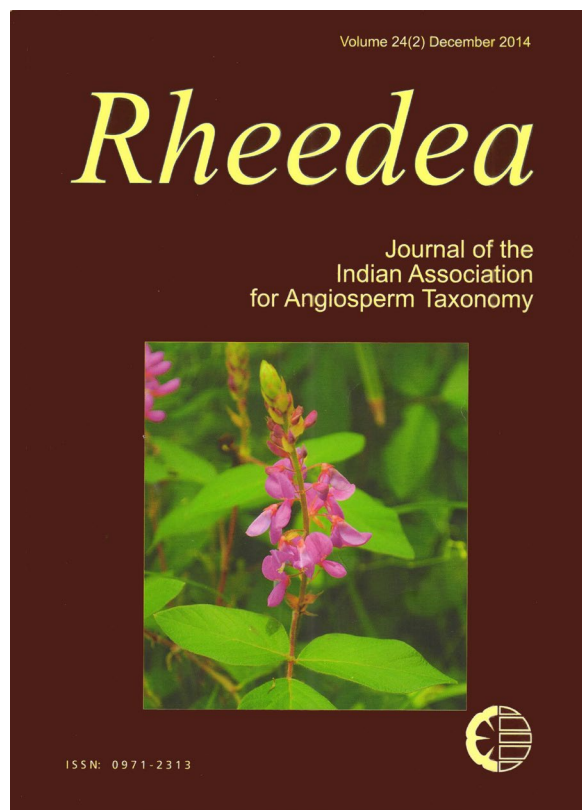




## Book Review: Flowering Plants of The Western Ghats, India

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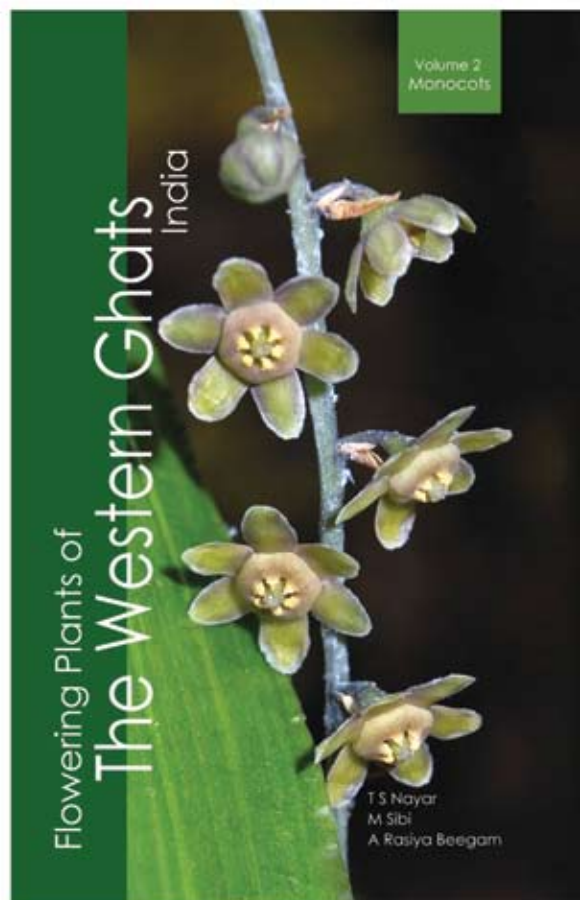
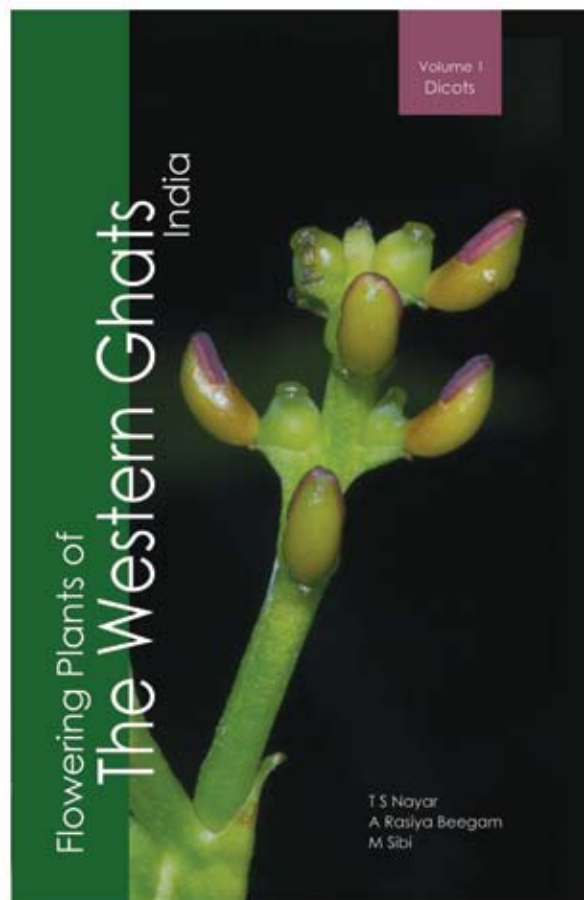
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## Book Review

T.S. Nayar, A. Rasiya Beegam and M. Sibi, 2014

### Flowering Plants of The Western Ghats, India

Published by Jawaharlal Nehru Tropical Botanic Garden and Research Institute, Palode, Thiruvananthapuram 695562, 2 Volumes (Vol. 1 Dicots, i-x + 934 pages, ISBN 978-81-920098-2-7; Vol.2 Monocots, i-vi + 935 – 1683 pages, ISBN 978-81-920098-3-4; Set ISBN ISBN 978-81-920098-9-6), HB, Price: Rs. 3,500/-; US \$ 200.00



The Western Ghats, along with Sri Lanka, is a focal point for conservation since it is recognized as a global biodiversity hotspot. However, a reference that provides a comprehensive list of plants for this diversity rich biogeographical region is lacking. This publication is the first of its kind for the region wherein information on all the species have been systematically compiled. The resulting numbers are mind boggling – a total of 8080 taxa including 7,402 species, 117 subspecies and 476 varieties. Among these 5,588 species are indigenous, 376 are naturalized exotics and 1,438 are cultivated. These figures emphasize why this publication attains importance as these figures have been arrived at for the first time. The earlier

estimates of species numbers are nowhere close to this. The authors have dealt with 23,000 scientific names and about 3,000 references to arrive at these figures, a daunting task by any means.

This work is basically an extension of earlier publication of these authors, viz. *Flowering Plants of Kerala: A Handbook*, with which it resembles in style and format. Is it one more Flora that has been produced? Neither the intent of the authors as expressed by them nor the content of the volumes indicates that it is just another flora. It is devoid of elaborate nomenclature, descriptions, keys, illustrations and colour photographs. The plant taxonomists, who are the major users of the Floras,

will be generally disappointed by their absence. The utility of this publication, nevertheless, will far exceed a normal Flora as realised by this reviewer.

People who have used *Flowering Plants of Kerala: A Handbook* will be at ease with the format, and for others there is a User's key provided on page 9. As in the case of its predecessor, one of the difficulties of using this book is referring to the number and going to the references. At least a couple of researchers, who have been requested by the reviewer to refer and provide feedback, felt so but they could not come out with a better alternative.

What else this work provides? 'Accepted name' in bold with references, synonyms and important references in different fonts to indicate whether they have been used as correct names or synonyms, references to descriptions and illustrations, nativity, habit, distribution at global level and state wise in Western Ghats (the latter in bold if it is endemic to the Western Ghats), phenology (variations indicated for different regions), IUCN threat category, economic importance and local names in six languages all with references etc. Font style has been used effectively to distinguish different types of information.

Certainly one would expect things that have escaped the attention in a work of this magnitude. Authors have consistently used 'accepted name' in place of 'correct name' following the plant list and 'ssp' in place of recommended abbreviation 'subsp' for subspecies. These could have been avoided. In the introductory chapters while providing the titles of various works, only year of publication without author's name is provided in the parenthesis which makes it difficult to search for that work under General References. Latest family treatments which are well accepted should have been followed, eg. Malvaceae (including Tiliaceae, Sterculiaceae, Bombacaceae) and Apocynaceae (including Asclepiadaceae, Periplocaceae). Since users are not sure the order of arrangement of

families, a separate index to families would have improved the users' experience much. Local names given are very useful as a short cut for identification, especially for the non-taxonomists. Though the index to local names provides page numbers where they appear, it takes some time to find them on the page. Authors' can think of providing unique number to each species in next edition, which can be referred to in brackets after the page numbers in the index that may facilitate the search much easier. Reaching references through numbers can also go wrong, eg. *Leucaena leucocephala* (p. 510) provides reference number 354 which is about *Gastrodia exilis*, an orchid (p. 1272); may be a rare instance.

This publication is certainly a comprehensive source book for the information on the plants of Western Ghats as it provides correct name, reference to the illustrations, economic uses, important taxonomic literature and status of species. As large numbers of people are interested in revision studies on various plant groups of this phytogeographical region, this publication will certainly be the first point of reference. The reviewer remembers the ordeal of referring to a number of sources, even to know the number of species in any genus or family in the Western Ghats. Not anymore! In my opinion, this book will serve the Western Ghats region more than any other book did so far. Now, I expect many more publication coming out from analysing the data provided herein, and for the years to come this is going to be the book cited very frequently for any plant related study on Western Ghats. A Book recommended for every botanist, forester, horticulturist, ecologist, invasive plant speices biologist, wild life biologist, naturalist, biodiversity specialist and plant taxonomist who wish to work on the Western Ghats.

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