The Oxford Book of Flowerless Plants

THE OXFORD BOOK OF FLOWERLESS PLANTS

FERNS, FUNGI, MOSSES AND LIVERWORTS

LICHENS, AND SEAWEEDS

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OXFORD NEW YORK TORONTO MELBOURNE
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

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INTRODUCTION

This book is a companion book to the *Oxford Book of Wild Flowers*. It is addressed to people of all ages who take pleasure in observing the living and growing things of the countryside. Beyond the world of flowers and trees, but intimately intermingled with it, is another world of flowerless plants. Although many of them are comparatively simple in structure, they are multifarious in form and colour, and they are quite as interesting and fascinating as the more familiar plants. Unfortunately, although flower books abound, those dealing with plants without flowers are few and in general highly technical in their approach. This book is intended to be in some measure an introduction to these scholarly works. If this book helps to bring the unfamiliar plants to people's notice, then some readers at least will pass on to more comprehensive books, a selection of which is listed under 'Further Reading' (page 201).

There are so many different kinds of flowerless plants that only a selection can be mentioned here. They are grouped in the natural localities in which they grow. There are five main sections — seashore, grasslands, uplands, wet places, and woodlands — which have been further subdivided as shown in the list of Contents (page v). Within each subdivision similar plants are grouped together. Five major groups are included — ferns and 'fern allies', mosses and liverworts, fungi, lichens, and seaweeds. A general account of these groups, and their main subdivisions, will be found on page 193.

The primary purpose of this book is to help the beginner with identification, though some information of general interest is given in the descriptions of the plants which appear opposite the colour plates. To know the name of a plant is to hold the key to obtaining further knowledge about it. There are no English names for the majority of the plants described here; most people have been content to speak generally of, say, lichens, seaweeds, or mosses, without distinguishing between the many different species in each group. Each species, however, has a scientific name. This is Latin in form and consists of two words, the first being a sort of surname borne by a group of related species (called a genus), and the second is applicable only to the particular species itself. The correct scientific (Latin) name can be found out by following a set of internationally agreed rules, which are based on the idea that the first person to describe a species is entitled to name it and have the name accepted universally. Everybody need not know the rules nor be able to apply them in detail, any more than it is necessary for a law-abiding citizen to know every detail of the law of the land. In cases of difficulty an expert may be consulted. But by using these names one can be certain of avoiding confusion and misunderstanding. It is possible to invent English names, but if every writer were entitled to follow his own fancy, there would be no way of being certain which plant was being referred to. One plant may have several English names, and one name may be used for more than one plant.

In this book the practice adopted in the standard work on British plants (*Flora of the British Isles*, by Clapham, Tutin and Warburg, 1962, C.U.P.) has been followed. In the few cases where a real English name exists — that is, a name that has really been used, and is not just a book name — it is given; and in other cases where a book name is available that is not merely a direct translation of the scientific name, this is also given but is enclosed in quotation marks. The reader is encouraged to make use of the scientific names, for he will then be able to find his way about in other books, and also make himself understood in other countries. Local names differ from place to place, but scientific names are universal.

No special elaborate apparatus is needed for the elementary study of flowerless plants, but as many of them are small, and the details of their structure are very tiny, a pocket magnifier or hand-lens magnifying between ten and twenty times, which may be purchased at a reasonable price, is very useful.