

## Book Review

### Figs of Southern and South-Central Africa

John and Sandra Burrows

2003, Umdaus Press (Pty) Ltd, PO Box 11059, Hatfield 0028, South Africa  
501 colour plates, 91 pen-and-ink figures, 379 pages, 310 x 240mm  
collectors' edition — ISBN 1-919766-25-1  
standard edition — ISBN 1-919766-24-3, price R650  
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'Figs of Southern and South-Central Africa' is anachronistic! The modern world, with its hectic lifestyle and overambitious goals, propagates reams of beautiful, rehashed texts. The Achilles heel of descriptive sciences, such as plant taxonomy, is that they accumulate inaccurate baggage which is perpetuated by this mindless rehashing of information. How refreshing to encounter a book which has been meticulously researched from its foundations. Such an approach is costly in effort, finance and time; however, the product speaks for itself. The authors have unravelled nomenclatural puzzles, come to terms with species boundaries, geographic and environmental variation and produced convincing species accounts, an achievement which escapes many similar popular books.

While uncompromising in its scientific accuracy, the book is sympathetic to the layperson (and many a scientist averse to using botanical keys) in being liberally illustrated. The colour photography has been contributed from various sources and documents habitat, habit and morphology of flowering and fruiting material. The family is without doubt photogenic but it takes talent to capture the artistic images

which liberally adorn the text. Line drawings are too seldom used in modern literature because, when executed with skill, they are peerless in conveying information. The pen-and-ink drawings complement the photographic record superbly.

Figs have great horticultural appeal and the book provides useful information for nurseries and indigenous gardeners in the chapters entitled 'Figs, birds and other wildlife' by Duncan Butchart, and 'Growing figs' by Geoff Nicholas.

Simon van Noort outlines the obligate mutualisms that exist between figs and fig wasps in a fascinating chapter. Scanning electron micrographs illustrate the micro-morphological evolution of wasp body parts and colour photographs depict the remarkable ovipositors of parasitoid wasps. A comprehensive geographic table is provided, outlining figs and their associated wasp fauna.

In all, the book covers 88 species, 48 indigenous and 17 exotic fig species. The remaining species are allied genera of the Moraceae, including mulberries (*Morus*), breadfruit (*Artocarpus*) and the delightful herbs of *Dorstenia*. It is an excellent buy for the professional botanist and layperson alike.

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