



Book Review

Elevitch C.R. (ed.), **Traditional Trees of Pacific Islands–Their Culture, Environment, and Use**, First edn., June 2006. Permanent Agriculture Resources, PO Box 428, Holualoa, Hawai'i 96725, USA, ISBN 0-9702544-5-8, Library of Congress Control #: 2006902888. Printed in China through Colorcraft Ltd., Hong Kong. Introductory price \$65 (plus shipping), limited offer. Hard cover – 816 pages, full colour – over 800 photographs, format 22.8 x 27.9 cm.

The book under review is a treasure-trove of information on 80 traditional tree species of the Pacific islands. It deals with all aspects of tree production in Hawai'i including ethnobotany, biology, ecology, horticulture, agriculture, forestry, and agroforestry. Each chapter is contributed by one or more specialist authors, and has been rigorously peer-reviewed also. It will form a valuable reference material for the academia, researchers, farming community, garden- and landscape-designers, foresters, and the general public interested in environmental conservation. We in the peninsular India, will find it particularly useful as many of the species discussed in the book abound in our landscape. Furthermore, the contemporary thrust on afforestation, reforestation, biodiversity conservation, and preserving ethnological knowledge everywhere, will enhance the relevance of this book. As stated in the foreword, "it will provide vast amount of information to address and to mitigate the environmental, cultural, and to some extent spiritual degradation that is occurring in most parts of the world". My congratulations to the editor and the individual authors.

Regarding the structure of the book, the individual species have been organized alphabetically, rather than adopting a family-wise, or importance-wise listing. Although a family-wise arrangement is more common in similar other compilations, the editor may have his own justification for not following that pattern. Likewise, while describing the individual species botanically, the preferred sequence is leaf, flower, and fruit rather than flower, leaf, and fruit. Nonetheless, the highlight of the book is the manner in which each chapter is organized into sections, some of them even as self-containing modules. In general, the opening module on individual species gives a synopsis

paraphrased by an attractive photograph. This is followed by sections on Introduction, Distribution, General/botanical description, Genetics, Associated plant species, Environmental preferences and tolerances, Growth and development, Propagation, Disadvantages, Agroforestry/Environmental practices, Uses and Products, Urban and Community forestry, Sources of Public Assistance, and Agroforestry Extension. The bibliography is extensive and includes recommended readings and important websites too.

As mentioned in the publisher's narrative, "the book is enriched with the presence of large number of excellent photographs with great scenic and aesthetic values". Another attractive feature of the book is the details on legends, religious value, important diseases or pests, wood quality, some do's and don'ts, and also information on related species, given in boxes.

Any book review cannot be complete unless some of the shortcomings are pointed out. Most glaring and somewhat exasperating is the manner in which certain themes and photographs have been repeated at places. A few instances where the information has been presented repetitively and that came to my notice are mentioned here (species followed by the repetitive details in parenthesis): *Acacia koa* (details such as shallow rooted, natural regeneration, fast growing, sensitive to elevation > 610 m etc.), *Agathis macrophylla* (the ceremonial/religious importance repeated under Uses and again under Products), *Aleurites moluccana* (100 seed weight and disseminated aboriginally), *Artocarpus heterophyllus* (use of jack fruit and leaves as cattle feed and colouring material for ropes), *Broussonetia papyrifera* (rooting system, p175/179), *Calophyllum inophyllum* (shade/over

storey and coastal protection), *Cocos nucifera* (soil stabilization, coastal protection and utility of coconut water), *Rhizophora* species (boxes: “What is a mangrove?” and “Mangroves and climate change”, p624/642 and 631/649) and sandalwood (photos of idols, p689/710). This is, however, not a complete listing of such snags. Removing repetitiveness would have shortened the bulk by ~10 %.

I also cannot help commenting that while showing overdrive for inclusion of photos with such great beauty and quality, some photos with more scientific details like leaf venation and margins, close-up of the flowers and inflorescences etc., in some chapters (e.g., p44, 59, 104, 112 etc.) may have enhanced the book’s appeal.

With more than 800 pages of large printed sheets, adding any more information would have made the book quite unwieldy. However, some more details on wood quality especially on some of the timber species would have enriched the scientific content of the book.

I could also find some typos/other errors. For example, to *be* located (p38), *Glochidion* (p45), such *as* one

(p49), *Oryctes* (p77), use in homegardens (p96), *Artocarpus* (112-126 footer), often less than (p450), and apomixes (p574). India is mentioned as an importer of betelnuts; this is, however, doubtful.

Some important omissions: utility of coconut shell for preparing handicraft items and artifacts, utility of activated charcoal obtained from coconut shell, use of *Gliricidia sepium* loppings as a source of green manure, ‘mango die-back’ disease and the recalcitrant nature of mango seeds, the dreaded spike disease of sandal, mahali disease and leaf yellowing of betel nut, root (wilt) disease of coconut, mangroves as the habitat of Royal Bengal tigers in Sunderbans of West Bengal (India) etc. Perhaps these may not be major issues in the Pacific islands— the focus of this book!

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