

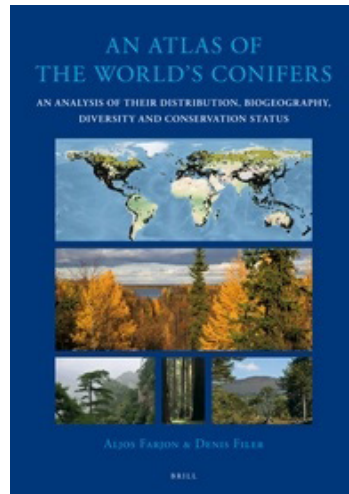
An Atlas of the World's Conifers

Aljos Farjon and Dennis Filer.

Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, the Netherlands. 2014.

512 pages. Hardbound. ISBN 9789004211803

€145



The subtitle of this book states that the objective is to provide for conifers “an analysis of their distribution, biogeography, diversity and conservation status” and the book does fulfil this objective. It is not and it does not try to be the typical “coffee table” book full of photographs of individual conifer species and their habitats, however, such a book would complement this volume.

An Atlas of the World's Conifers provides detailed information on the distribution of genera and their species across the world. It starts with a discussion of the global and trans-continental distribution of coniferous genera to show how genera have spread across the earth, mainly as a result of continental drift. It then discusses the distribution of genera and species across eight major regions of the world (North, Central and South America, Europe and the Mediterranean, mainland Asia and Japan, Malesia, Australasia, and Africa). Discussions on individual species provide geographic details of where the species are found including site requirements and associated species. Computer generated maps of species distribution based on verified herbarium specimens are provided for each species.

There are many interesting facts provided between the covers of this book. For example, the second largest of the coniferous genera (after pines) are the Podocarps which consists of 175 species mainly located in the southern hemisphere. Although

when we think often of only one member of this family, *Araucaria* (the monkey puzzle), there are in fact 36 other genera in the family. While some genera such as the Podocarps and Araucarias are found only in the southern hemisphere, the entire 24 members of the yew (*Taxus*) family all originate from the northern hemisphere. This book explains why. California is home to 52 different species of conifers, but there are many other such conifer “hotspots” discussed here. If you find these facts interesting you will find more in this book.

Of particular interest are conifers from Malesia, which includes the countries of Brunei, East Timor, Indonesia, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines and Singapore, as well as Australasian species, which includes the countries of Australia, New Zealand and the neighbouring Pacific Ocean islands. Here many exotic and very different genera can be found, some of which at first do not seem at all like conifers.

This is a book for real “dyed-in-the-wool” conifer enthusiasts. It is not the type of book that readers will pick up and read from cover to cover, but rather to select specific genera or species to explore. There are species here that most of us have never seen, but will discover in this book. Readers may be disappointed with the lack of species photographs, but there are other books available that can complement this volume. My only criticism of the book is that the herbarium-based maps do not always show the complete natural distribution of the species.

If you think Sitka spruce, lodgepole pine and the other conifers we see so frequently every day are “boring”, then I would suggest you take a look at the range of species discussed in this book. Conifers will no longer be “boring”.

*David Thompson
Hollybrook
Ashtown Lane
Wicklow Town
Co. Wicklow*