

*THE TREES OF BRITAIN AND NORTHERN EUROPE*

Alan Mitchell and John Wilkinson

Collins, London. UK£3.95 (paperback ISBN 0 00 219035 4), UK£6.95 (hardback ISBN 0 00 219037 0).

This "Complete Pocket Tree Guide" contains illustrations and descriptions of the more commonly encountered trees, native and introduced, of the British Isles and northern Europe, although clearly it is intended mainly for users in Great Britain and Ireland. Over 600 species, varieties and cultivars are illustrated in about 1,500 coloured drawings, and there are 40 black-and-white winter silhouettes of common deciduous trees. A series of keys is provided, written in simple English without complicated botanical terminology. The illustrations fill the pages alongside the descriptive paragraphs, so that each page is colourful. Each tree is described briefly and there are notes on native habitats, behaviour in cultivation and special characters which aid identification. The illustrations, which range from habits to details of shoots, flowers and fruits, are generally adequate without being minutely exact.

This is a less technical work than Mitchell's earlier *A field guide to the Trees of Britain and Northern Europe* (Collins, 1974), which covered almost the same subject. The new volume is a virtual precis of the "Field Guide" which was not as colourful nor as profusely illustrated. The "Field Guide" contained more detailed descriptions which are botanically precise. This new book, therefore, is not intended for botanists or dendrologists seeking a scientific text, (the "Field Guide" serves that role better) rather it is a book to be used by those generally interested in trees especially people who want to identify specimens growing in Irish arboreta and gardens.

Ireland has only a handful of native trees and all are covered in this volume apart from controversial species like the endemic *Sorbus hibernica* (Irish whitebeam). What is lacking in our native woodlands is amply compensated for in our plantations. At a guess there may be over 1,000 species and many more varieties and cultivars growing in the great gardens in Ireland. Alas these are all too infrequently labelled, so this volume can be recommended as a useful book to be kept in the car and carried in one's pocket when visiting gardens or parks.

Indeed, a novel and amusing feature of the book is the final section which gives dimensions (height and trunk girth) of trees in the British Isles. The ones selected for quotation from Mitchell's vast accumulation of such data, are record specimens. It is interesting that Kilmacurragh tops the Irish list with 11 specimens which are either the tallest or have the greatest trunk girth in the British Isles. Powerscourt comes second with 10, followed by Mount Usher (7) and Glasnevin (6). Headfort, Gosford Castle and Castletwellan each have 2, and ten other gardens have 1 apiece. Surprises abound! Most of Glasnevin's records are pines although the Botanic Gardens are said to have a poor environment for conifers. Eccles Hotel, Glengarriff, has the tallest *Eucalyptus globulus* in the British Isles, at 46 metres — is this the tallest tree in Ireland?

This attractive little book should appeal to natural historians, gardeners and foresters. It does not provide comprehensive botanical descriptions but there are many other books which can be consulted if precise identifications are required. It is well printed, although the review copy (a paperback) had loose pages and the paperback version may not stand up to too much wear-and-tear. One serious error occurs on p.255 where the Chusan palm and the Canary palm illustrations are all incorrectly assigned.

E. Charles Nelson