

BOOK REVIEW

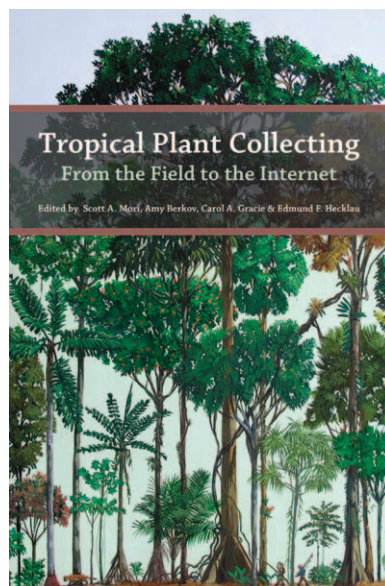
TROPICAL PLANT COLLECTING—FROM THE FIELD TO THE INTERNET, 2011, Scott A. Mori, Amy Berkov, Carol A. Gracie, and Edmund F. Hecklau, eds. (TECC Editoria, Florianópolis, Brazil, xvii + 332 pp.) More than a very practical guide, which it certainly is, this book starts as an assortment of personal accounts, beginning with the first two chapters penned by two of the editors, Mori and Gracie. Smaller narratives appear in Chapter 3, “Tips for Tropical Biologists,” lending credence to the guidance being given; for example, although it should be obvious not to use a machete as a walking stick, Mori’s and de Granville’s personal stories of injuries when doing so tell you that anyone can show bad judgment at times.

Geographic emphasis is placed on the Neotropics of the Brazilian and Guyanese Amazon basin, parts of Central America, and the Brazilian Atlantic forest of Bahia, while tree field studies, particularly the Brazil nut family (Lecythidaceae), Mori’s specialty, are covered extensively. These self-imposed restrictions do not negate the applicability to many or most other situations, although the reader finds a (neo-) tropical orientation. Furthermore, there is the consistent theme of working in foreign countries for extended time periods far from the conveniences and familiarity of the home institution. Safety, too, is an underlying theme.

Not until Chapter 4, “From the Field,” does the book buckle down and directly address field collecting. Coverage goes beyond the “usual” dictums, which the author views as having been adequately discussed elsewhere (a listing of the significant classic works is provided), and so the remaining topic commentaries are purposeful and specific; for example, I have not previously read so many minute and relevant points regarding recording a collector’s name and number. Much attention is paid to climbing equipment and clipper pole construction and assembly because there’s a need to climb trees (consider that 68% of the species found in central French Guiana, a region well worked by Mori, are trees along with the epiphytes and lianas they support). Field drying methods and drying frame construction also get their due.

Chapter 5, “Into the Herbarium,” moves on to managing herbaria—specimens and data—both the physical and electronic. Again, Mori limits his comments to matters he considers not adequately addressed in the previously mentioned manuals. There’s consistent emphasis on entering only specimens that add new information, as to do otherwise is costly in terms of space and time.

Chapter 6, “Onto the Internet,” follows, bringing this book into its current applicability, and introduces the reader, if he or she is not already on board, to the expediency that current technology provides in conveying one’s results out into the arena of use by others.



Four appendices are included. The meatiest appendix is “Funding for Systematic Botany,” in which several potential avenues of economic support are explored: the familiar such as NSF and more novel such as ecotours. Two appendices address the all-important “what to bring” questions: “Personal Field Supplies” and “Essential Collecting Equipment,” featuring Mori’s favorite, practical inclusions (many are specifically referenced in the text). Finally a “Literature Cited” section reflects the wide-ranging sources (including some of ecological, ethnobotanical, and conservation origins and in several languages) utilized in the text.

This book is such an interesting and involving read with many photographs and drawings that it would be advisable for anyone contemplating working as a field biologist, an armchair traveler, or even the visitor to the less visited corners of the world to read. All are likely to appreciate learning how biological science advances these days. The expedition style associated with former days and the new electronic style of data organization and communication are meshed into a remarkable partnership.—*Ann Pinzl, Curator Emerita, Nevada State Museum, Carson City, Nevada*