

Field Guides to the West Coast

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Wild Flower of Forest and Woodland; Wild Flowers of Field and Slope; Wild Flowers of Marsh and Waterway; Wild Flowers of the Sea Coast;

Lewis Clark. Gray's Publishing, Sidney, B.C., 1974.

Unpagged \$2.95 each, paper.

These volumes are a visual treat. The stock is heavy and glossy and the illustrations are all in colour. For most of the pictures the colours are excellent. The pictures have fine resolution and great depth. Dr. Clark was undoubtedly a masterful photographer. Many of his pictures presented singly would win awards in competitions. With any collection of photographs, however, there are always some that are disappointing. I would consider in Volume 1 that pictures 9, 15, 16, 30, 54, 84, 93, 99 and 100 are a bit too dark. When too dark, the subject seems to have poor resolution and the over-all effect is "muddy".

These volumes are extracted from the author's large volume "Wild Flowers of British Columbia" Gray Publishing Ltd. 1973 pp 1-591, \$29.95. Since this volume has a large format (8 1/2" x 11") and the field guides are small (5 1/2" x 8 1/4") one might expect the pictures to be greatly reduced in size. Such is not the case. Many are of the same dimensions, whereas others are only slightly reduced e.g. from X.75 to X.6 for the picture of Wild Ginger.

The chief limitation in the use of this series is the scope of the coverage. For Volume 1 there are 101 illustrations of different species. Only 22 of these occur in eastern Canada while some others, such as Wild Ginger, Trillium, Dogwood etc. are near relatives of eastern species. This is apt to confuse a child. For example, looking at Picture 9 of *Trillium ovatum*, Large White Trillium, the child would logically assume that the Ontario provincial symbol, which *does* look very similar, is this species. Instead, the Ontario species is *T. grandiflorum* and part of a different flora. *T. ovatum* is a western species found from B.C. to California. Accordingly, these books will have their maximum use in the Pacific Northwest.

The second limitation for these Field Guides concerns their use. They have a high aesthetic value but a low pragmatic and educational value. One expects a field guide to be a manual for identification. Dr. Clark advises that "one scan the pictures repeatedly, testing his recall of each name. By this means he will become familiar with the general appearance of the plants of each genus, and acquire a set of mental images to which he can relate each plant in the field". I would feel one of the greatest stumbling blocks in this approach is the variable magnifications of the pictures. "How big is it?" is a question that a child asks very soon in its life. One marvels at the beauty of Picture 11--Fairy Slipper - magnification given at X1.0; but will a child realize just how small the plant will be when growing on the forest floor? One should try putting the book on the floor and visualizing the plant! Conversely,

Picture 43 at X7.0 will only be appreciated when one already knows the plant. It is not at all as it appears to the eye.

The author states that the plants are arranged in an Englerian system with primitive families first and ending with the advanced Compositae. However, *no* families are mentioned as they are in his larger volume so that the system is obscure. The system will be meaningless to a child as no grouping is attempted. Most botanists would agree with Dr. Clark that colour separation is arbitrary and difficult when some species have more than one colour. Nevertheless, for amateurs, "What colour was it?" is a major clue. The author gives no aids of any kind for one to reach the name of a plant from the 137 names that are in Volume 1.

I would consider that the "descriptions" for the species are far too fanciful and pedantic for most children e.g. Pictures 36 Inside-Out-Flower. "The extraordinary flower reminds one of pirouetting ballet dancers in white tutus". At other times, the description is extremely short e.g. Vol. 2. 60-Cascara. "Grouped, erect, silver-grey barked stems reach 15-30'. Leaves are. 3-4" and *unmistakable*". In the large book we are told that it is the ovate leaves with prominent veins that make them so distinctive.

In Field Guides 3 and 4 a new problem is apparent. Dr. Clark died in 1974 and the editing was taken over by John G. S. Trelawny. The format appears to be very rigid. In Guides 3 and 4 the two introductions of 4-5 pages are very similar and the number of pages and photographs is fixed at between 90 and 96. Into this format must be fitted in Guide 3 those wildflowers which are in "marsh and waterway". Since a number of aquatic plants are not showy, the editor has had to fall back on many which are only marginally associated with the category of "marsh and waterway". There are only five orchids in this book and one would expect more, but others have been placed in Guides 1 and 2. To avoid overlap, the editor has had to choose 90 *new* examples for Guide 3. No two experts would agree on which species should be included. The coverage certainly does not do justice to aquatic species.

I feel that Guide 4-*Wildflowers of the Sea Coast* is more successful in that the plants illustrated are typical of a very distinctive community. For people walking along the Pacific Coast this guide will be worthwhile, although the limitations for use by children have been outlined in the comments on Guides 1 and 2.

This series will have its place for those in the Pacific Northwest. Traditionally Botanists have considered Canada to be made up of a northeastern flora (Ontario and East), the central plains, the rocky mountains, coastal B.C. and the Arctic (eastern and western). More volumes have been written for the heavily populated East than for other regions and yet none are completely satisfactory for children. The authors have had the initial difficulty of deciding on what to include as "wild flowers" and then after this rather arbitrary exercise, deciding on whether to adhere to a botanical classification or a purely artificial system e.g. "flowers white, bloom in the spring". Accordingly, I know of no books on wildflowers that are easy to use, informative, reasonably comprehensive and at the same time aesthetically pleasing. Perhaps it is a case of trying to please too many masters!

In summary, these volumes are a delight to the eye, but they will be frustrating to use for identification and will teach the user little Botany.

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