

BOOK REVIEW

Marine Plants of the Caribbean. A Field Guide from Florida to Brazil. By D. S. Littler, M. M. Littler, K. E. Bucher, and J. N. Norris. Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, D.C. 20560, USA. 221 color, 7 B & W illus. 5 x 7 5/8, 272 pp. 1989. Price: US\$14.95

This colorful little book is the type of field guide that is desperately needed by all those who are interested in observing or studying the great diversity of plants and animals that inhabit the shallow tropical seas, particularly around coral reefs.

In organizing this book, the authors have kept the nonspecialist in mind and have avoided complex scientific terminology and taxonomic keys. The algae are grouped by color and indexed by color-coded pages, then further subdivided on the basis of their growth patterns.

Most of the book is devoted to the identification of marine algae, but it also includes two pages on the microscopic diatoms and dinoflagellates in addition to an introduction to five seagrasses, the flowering plants of the sea. The reader is provided with excellent color photographs of each plant and a brief description of its basic characteristics and habitat preferences--in much the same format as that used in the popular bird and insect guidebooks.

The authors are to be commended for their clear introduction to the classification, growth forms, and scientific names of marine plants. They also describe the reef and mangrove areas that these plants inhabit and give helpful hints on how to collect and photograph them. The water-resistant cover is an additional bonus that makes this a truly usable field guide for both scientists and tourists.

One word of caution: As the authors point out, this book covers the more abundant Caribbean marine plants, which account for only about one-third of the known species of this area. Users must therefore avoid making hasty identifications when they find a species that seems to resemble one in the book. These plants are not always easy to distinguish. For example, Rhipocephalus oblongus, which is not covered in the book, might be confused with Penicillus capitatus, both of which have similar growth patterns.

This publication can be ordered from Smithsonian Institution Press, Department 900, Blue Ridge Summit, PA 17294, USA. An additional \$2.24 should be included for postage and handling costs.

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