

A Key to Australian Grasses. 2nd Edition.

BRYAN K. SIMON. Published by Queensland Department of Primary Industries, 1993. 206 pp. Price A\$35 + handling.

Grass is the basis for livestock production throughout the world, and Australia has a wealth of native grass species. These include species which are palatable to cattle and ones that are unpalatable, and species which are quite tolerant of heavy grazing and ones which disappear when the pressure is on. Pasture and rangeland scientists need to have an understanding of the species which occur in the grasslands they are studying.

This is an expanded second edition of a book which appeared in 1990. It is complete for Australia, and includes 1,408 species, with keys for their identification. More than 100 of these species were not recorded at a census of Australian grasses in 1981. As well as having been updated, the inclusion of additional material in the second edition has improved the book markedly.

The introductory chapter provides a classification of grasses into their Subfamilies, Supertribes, Tribes and Subtribes, with a listing of genera in each taxon. A useful glossary of

botanical terms and stylised diagrams illustrating the typical features of Australian tribes and subtribes are additional features. There are two keys to genera, one being the traditional type and the other a computer-generated key, and these are followed by the keys to species, which take up the major part of the book. Genera are in alphabetical order, which is very convenient for those of us who have difficulty remembering which tribe a genus belongs to!

The couplets in the various keys are generally simple and straight-forward, although often requiring a lens and dissection of spikelets for determination. For a family such as the grasses, this is inevitable. Those species which are introduced and naturalised are indicated with an asterisk, and recent synonyms included. Apart from the stylised illustrations of grass tribes and subtribes, the book is not illustrated.

The first edition of Bryan Simon's book was well-thumbed and in a prominent place in my book shelf. The second edition, I am quite sure, will be equally as useful.

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