



Ethnobotany of the Caucasus: A Book Review

Zubair A. Malik

Book review

Ethnobotany of the Caucasus. Bussmann, Rainer W., ed. 2017. Springer Nature, Cham, Switzerland. xxviii +746 pp. (hardcover). USD 299.00. ISBN 978-3-319-49411-1; DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-49412-8

The incredible diversity (historic, cultural, economic, religious, and ethnical), and the importance of the Caucasus region (especially as a transit area for the Silk Road), has led to the development of a wide range of distinct ways to use plant resources, be it for food, medicine, or utensils and tools. The book under review (*Ethnobotany of the Caucasus*) that is a part of book series, *European Ethnobotany* (<https://www.springer.com/series/13783?detailsPage=titles>) is a very timely compilation of the important wild plant species used in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Sakartvelo (Republic of Georgia).

In the *Preface*, the region of Caucasus has been described as *ethnobotanists' dream destination* because of the combination of diverse ecosystems, fostering a huge botanical diversity, together with ancient plant use practice, and the breath-taking hospitality of the denizens.

Correspondence

Zubair A. Malik^{1,2}

¹Department of Botany and Microbiology, HNB Garhwal University, Srinagar Garhwal Uttarakhand (India)-246174

²Presently at Department of Biology, Govt. HSS Harduturoo Anantnag (J&K) - 192201

*Corresponding Author:
malikmzubair081@gmail.com

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The book provides an in-depth introduction to the Caucasus (Part –I), as well as the three countries covered (Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia) followed by an overview of 190 important plant species in the region (Part-II). Caucasus is described as one of the most beautiful, and botanically as well as ethno-botanically interesting regions of the globe that has steeped in mythology since biblical and Greek times. Various features (including geography, geology, climate, flora & vegetation, human plant use history, threats to plant diversity and use, geomorphology, landscape and terrain) of these regions are dealt in detail.

Each chapter of *Part II* describes either a particular species of a family (e.g. *Abies nordmanniana* of Pinaceae and *Agasyllis latifolia* of Apiaceae) or a few species of the same genus of a particular family (e.g. four species of genus *Alcea* i.e. *Alcea hyrcana*, *A. lenkoranica*, *A. rugosa*, *A. tabrisiana* of Malvaceae) and rarely two different genera of the same family (e.g. *Danae* and *Ruscus* of Asparagaceae) are described together (P 253). The chapters (total 129 in number) describing plant profiles feature a modern overview on taxonomy, local names, and information on the ecology and distribution of all species, local medicinal/food/handicraft and other uses. The ethnobotanical information provides both an overview on historic uses, as well as data from the recent scientific studies of plant use in the region and contains the up-to-date literature sources. The plant species described are arranged in an alphabetic order, irrespective of the family to which they belong.

Detailed phytochemistry of the described species is skipped. Discussion of phytochemistry is essential especially while discussing the medicinal properties/uses of plants. The botanical description of plants is excellent wherein minute details of morphological characters and major events of the life cycle (flowering & fruiting) in different regions (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia) are given. This along with high-quality photographs (over 300 in number), taken by the editor and/or contributors, makes the

books an ideal and reliable pictorial field guide that would help the students/researchers in identifying and locating these plants. Although most of the photographs are of high quality, a few of them are not so clear, as for example that of *Amaranthus retroflexus* (P 108) *Berberis vulgaris* (139), *Falcaria vulgaris* (301), *Gleditsia caspica* (320) etc.

The different details (like local names, ethnobotany etc.) of described plant species are not compared with other far flung/distant regions as is done in the volumes of *Ethnobotany of the Mountain Regions* (<https://link.springer.com/bookseries/15885>).

Despite some above-mentioned minor lacunae, it is hoped that this book will provide an opportunity to both interested laypeople as well as professionals to learn about the fascinating biodiversity and plant use culture of the Caucasus and will develop interest in its further documentation, sustainable use, and conservation.