



Ethnobotany of the Mountain Regions of Eastern Europe Carpathians-A Book Review

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Book Review

Ethnobotany of the Mountain Regions of Eastern Europe Carpathians. Rainer W. Bussmann, Narel Y. Paniagua-Zambrana and Zaal Kikvidze (Eds). Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2025, pp xxxii + 3127, €353.09 (eBook), €329.99 (Hardcover), ISBN 978-3-031-87801-5 (Hardcover), ISBN 978-3-031-87802-2 (eBook). <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-87802-2>

Can a single book capture centuries of plant knowledge, cultural traditions, and ecological diversity spread across one of Europe's most complex mountain systems? The latest volume in the *Ethnobotany of Mountain Regions* series attempts precisely that and succeeds remarkably well.

Ethnobotany is the flourishing interdisciplinary scientific field, which covers all types of interactions between plants and people. *While ethnobotanical studies are now available from many regions of the world, the main objective of Ethnobotany of Mountain Regions is to take advantage of the increasing international interest and scholarship in the field of mountain research.* Many volumes of this book series have been already published (Ethnobotany of Mountain Regions | Book titles in this series).

The book under review (Ethnobotany of the Mountain Regions of Eastern Europe Carpathians) is part of this book series, which has previously covered the Andes, Himalayas, Caucasus, Northern Africa etc. Compared with other regional ethnobotanical compilations such as Ethnobotany of the Himalayas and Ethnobotany of the Caucasus, this Carpathian volume stands out for its encyclopedic coverage, standardized species descriptions, and clear visual documentation. The Carpathians are the second-largest mountain range in Europe and provide multiple ecosystem services of regional significance. The Carpathian edition of book series focuses on one of Europe's richest biocultural landscapes, spanning seven countries and hosting over 7500 plant species. With over 3000 pages of meticulously curated content and more than 2000 figures, the book documents centuries of traditional plant knowledge, ecological diversity, and cultural practices through a blend of regional synthesis and species-level detail. All the plant species are nicely described wherein very minute details of morphological characters and major events of the lifecycle (flowering & fruiting) are given. This along with high-quality photographs (taken by the editors 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. The overall design and layout are visually appealing, with high-quality printing, logical arrangement of sections, and vibrant color images that enhance readability and field usability. The already documented but scattered information on various uses of plants (medicinal, food, handicrafts and

others) is amassed nicely. Published in 2025, the book incorporates recent ethnobotanical surveys and updated taxonomic information, making it one of the most current references on European mountain flora.

Ethnobotany of Mountain Regions of Eastern Europe: Carpathians covers in detail the mountains and valleys of this region, which are known to be rich in unique medicinal and food plant species. Local communities residing in the mountain regions of Eastern Europe possess unique knowledge of surrounding resources, which is the result of many years of interaction with and selection of the most desirable and pervasive plant species present. In this context this major reference work provides comprehensive information on cross-culture variation in the traditional uses of plants as food, medicine, and for cultural purposes among these diverse communities residing in Eastern Europe. The key areas of focus include plant diversity in the Carpathians, cross cultural variation in traditional uses of plant species by these communities, high-value medicinal and food plant species, and threats and conservation status of plant species and traditional knowledge.

The book is divided into two major sections:

Part I: Regional Ethnobotany: It offers a comprehensive overview of the Carpathian region's geography, climate, vegetation zones and phytodiversity. Chapters such as "Ethnobotany of Eastern Europe: The Carpathian Region" provide deep insight into the Ukrainian Carpathians, highlighting endemic species, altitudinal vegetation belts, and traditional medicinal practices.

Part II: Species Monographs: This part collectively encompasses 301 chapters distributed across four volumes. It features hundreds of plant entries, each structured with synonyms, botanical description and taxonomy, ecology, local names across languages, phytochemistry and pharmacological relevance, medicinal, culinary, and cultural uses, comparative ethnobotany from other regions, high-quality photographs and extensive references. The book also includes a well-structured index and species list, enabling quick reference for readers searching for specific taxa or ethnobotanical uses. Species such as *Abies alba*, *Acorus calamus*, *Convallaria majalis*, *Convolvulus arvensis*, and *Coriandrum sativum* are documented with remarkable depth, including folk recipes, veterinary uses, and ritual significance.

This book is the result of the collaborative efforts of 16 contributors representing five countries: Uzbekistan (5), Georgia (4), Ukraine (3), Germany (2), and Pakistan (2). Their collective scholarship and regional expertise have contributed to creating a comprehensive documentation of ethnobotanical knowledge. The major strengths of this book include:

Interdisciplinary Depth: The book integrates botany, pharmacology, anthropology, and conservation science, making it valuable across disciplines.

Cultural Sensitivity: Local names, traditional practices, and regional dialects are respectfully included, enhancing authenticity.

Comparative Ethnobotany: Many entries link Carpathian plant uses to traditions in Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the Himalayas.

Visual Documentation: Richly illustrated with ethnographic photographs, botanical scans, and habitat imagery.

Editorial Coherence: Despite its scale, the book maintains a consistent structure across chapters, authored by a collaborative team of experts.

Applied Relevance: Addresses climate change, biodiversity loss, and the erosion of traditional knowledge, with implications for conservation and sustainable development.

However, there are following areas that need improvement:

Editorial Uniformity: Some species entries vary in depth while certain chapters omit ecological data or preparation methods that are standard elsewhere.

Regional Imbalance: While the Ukrainian and Slovak Carpathians are well-covered, other regions (e.g., Polish, Romanian, and Serbian Carpathians) could benefit from deeper ethnobotanical representation.

Integration with Modern Pharmacology: Although phytochemical profiles are detailed, connections to contemporary clinical research are limited. Bridging traditional uses with biomedical validation would enhance translational value.

Image Quality: A few chapters would benefit from higher-resolution photographs and annotated illustrations for clearer botanical identification.

Fieldwork Transparency: Including fieldwork dates, informant demographics, and methodological notes would strengthen ethnographic credibility.

No major typographical or factual errors were noticed, indicating careful editorial oversight. Like the other volumes in this book series, this book succeeds in preserving traditional knowledge while maintaining scientific accuracy (Malik 2020, 2021,

2022a, b, c, Malik et al., 2025). What makes the Carpathian volume stand out is its incredible depth and focus on mountain ecosystems that are both culturally rich and ecologically fragile.

It is a must-have reference for university libraries, research centers, and anyone interested in mountain ecology, traditional medicine, or plant diversity. Though its price may seem high for individual readers, the book offers excellent value for institutional libraries and researchers, given its scope, quality, and comprehensiveness.

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