

Desmids of the Lowlands: Mesotaeniaceae and Desmidiaceae of the European Lowlands

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What a splendid Desmid Flora with the excellently simple illustrations that Desmid experts are so good at. I can't wait to try it on living material but have enjoyed examining the book during my recovery from a hip operation (when there was time to be passed!). This very easily appreciated text is basically an update of the earlier Dutch Flora now extended to cover nearby Belgian and German lowlands. For those who may have struggled to read the original, this will be most welcome, and will prove a new and useful source of taxonomic information for others. Not being an intuitive user of new IT programs, I miss having a proper introduction and explanation as to the uses of the accompanying CD and so hope that it is proof against any misuse. I am sure that it will be an asset when properly used.

The text and illustrations of the book provide an easy understanding for the non-expert and the more expert, and one can smile at the few un-English idioms that escaped the linguistic screener. It also reminds one that auto-proofing will not always catch the spelling errors as in 'ore' for 'or' and the improper mix of English and Latin '& al.' In the introductory section, I found the explanatory life cycle well worth following carefully and wish that some of those excellent illustrations could have been larger. I did wish that the ecology had been more fully explored, especially as I have been struck by the range of biodiversity with so many forms occurring so rarely.

Within the flora itself, the generic descriptions are clear and concise, as were the well formulated descriptions of the species. It would have been nice to have the dates for the authorities to provide the historical framework for the nomenclature, even though this is not a requirement and they do appear on the CD. Clearly I could only work through samples of the generic keys and would assume that these have already been well tested in the previous version. The division of the larger genera into subsections seemed very practical. I have to hope that these keys will serve for the study of material in similar locations elsewhere in Europe. I did miss a single glossary collating the explanation of terms.

It is a pity that the plates are confined to the end of the book, as this may tempt students to identify by figure and not make full use of the text. I find a bookmark is essential. I found the age range of the references to be a salutary reminder of the importance of good reference libraries.

Elizabeth Y Haworth

Author Profile

Elizabeth is currently the Honorary Curator of the Fritsch Collection of Algal Illustrations and Honorary Research Fellow of the Freshwater Biological Association. A diatomist and palaeolimnologist, she was for many years part of the FBAs palaeolimnology group headed by Winifred Tutin (Pennington) and worked on a variety of environmental changes - such as eutrophication, acidification - as well as the modern ecology and taxonomy of diatoms.