

## Book Reviews

---

***The Lichen Hunters*. By Oliver Gilbert.** 2004. Lewes, Sussex: The Book Guild. Pp 208, plus 16 pages of colour photographs. ISBN 1 85776 930 9. Hardback, with illustrated dust cover. Price £16.95.  
doi:10.1017/S0024282905210022

[**Editorial note:** in an unusual departure from normal practice, two reviews are presented for this unique book – a wholly lichenological autobiography by a long-time contributor to this journal. The first review is from one of the ‘old’ generation who developed his lichenological skills during the early days of the British Lichen Society, and who now resides in Canada, whereas the second review is from one of our new generation of British lichen enthusiasts.]

The author of this book is the well-known British lichenologist who recently [2000] contributed to the ‘The New Naturalist Library’ series with *Lichens*, published by HarperCollins. He is an enthusiastic field lichenologist and in *The Lichen Hunters* recalls his experiences over the last forty years. This encompassed the early years of the British Lichen Society when there was a resurgence of interest in lichens that spread throughout the country and beyond.

The book opens with a chapter on the history of field meetings organized by the fledgling British Lichen Society. A chapter follows which focuses on four society field meetings to give a flavour of activities, the places visited, and the lichens found. Following this, there are chapters on islands, mountains, neglected habitats, weekend excursions and day trips. The book winds up with a description of the six stages that a novice lichenologist goes through before becoming a mature, experienced field lichenologist.

The book was, I assume, constructed from diaries and field notes which Oliver has kept over the years. One gets insight into activities of the British Lichen Society and the characteristics of some of the more famous amateur and professional British lichenologists. However, the book is one man’s recollection of these events. As a person who took part in many of the early British Lichen Society field meetings, I think some aspects and personalities could have received more emphasis. For example, the book does not quite provide the sense of camaraderie present during those early years, which was outstanding, or of the enthusiasm that was unbound. At each field meeting, a local hotel was normally designated as the centre. Professional or well-heeled lichenologists stayed there while students like myself and amateurs like the primary school teacher Nancy Wallace stayed at B&Bs. In those days, before bureaucratic controls, B&Bs cost very little, often less than a pound a night. However, each evening

everyone met up in the hotel lounge, school or hall to examine and discuss specimens. While Peter James and Dougal Swinscow were the Pundits, it was Frank Brightman who helped and encouraged all. His role could have been better described in the accounts. Frank and Fred Haynes with their vans provided transportation: there were no seat belts or passenger limits in those days! Sometimes they brought their young families, as on the Scottish Trip to Killin and Kinlochewe. Another person, who features less than deserved, is Mark Seaward. He regularly attended field meetings, took on and developed the British Lichen Society Mapping Scheme. It was the mapping card and presence of the mapping recorder, Mark, that encouraged systematic recording during field work and enthused people to search for new records or make an excursion to one of the 10 km squares not previously visited.

The book is an easy read, but what will international colleagues like North American lichenologists or bryologists make of it? Bryologists will enjoy the anecdotes of the pleasures and pain of fieldwork on mountain tops, islands or woodlands. They will note cultural differences between the British approach to fieldwork and their own field experience. The accounts may stimulate ideas for excursions of local naturalist groups in North America. The colour photos in the book, some quite dramatic, and the outline map of Britain, may suggest places to visit on a future trip to the UK. Lichenologists will enjoy the book even more than bryologists. The many lichens mentioned in the field excursion accounts will allow a comparison with similar habitats in North America. Furthermore, many of the personalities, such as Peter James, Ursula Duncan, Dougal Swinscow, Brian Coppins, Alan Fryday, William Purvis, and Frank Dobson, have become known to North American lichenologists through their publications. The character sketches of these people and their field activities will be appreciated. Few publishers, today, would consider a manuscript that is essentially a diary of field excursions sprinkled with plant names in Latin and which describes the amateurs and professionals who have dedicated their lives to a group of organisms with little economic importance. Certainly, at least one book can be justified and this one does a good job of setting down for posterity the growing devotion of members of the British Lichen Society to fieldwork. I hope that both naturalists and libraries will purchase this modestly priced book.

Successful sales could perhaps encourage an author and publisher to produce a parallel volume on the 'Moss hunters of North America' – thereby enabling an interesting comparison of both the science and sociology of field work as experienced in the new and old world!

### David H. S. Richardson

All members of the British lichen community and many foreign lichenologists will know the author of this book, either personally, or through his contributions to the field during c. 40 years. In this latest book, Oliver Gilbert draws on four decades of experience, documenting and exploring a very personal passion for lichens. It is difficult to reduce this book to a simple category, though it is perhaps best described as a lichenological travelogue. It is deeply personal, often expansive and amusing; there are moments of introspection, though these resonate strongly with the reader, as the author describes the highs and lows of fieldwork that enriched his studies.

The book comprises eight chapters. The first chapter '*A History of Fieldwork 1955–2001*' is essentially a history and characterization of the British Lichen Society (BLS), taking the period from its inception in 1958 to the present day. This opening chapter charts the development of the BLS through the activities of the membership – from the events leading up to the inaugural meeting of twenty-five people at the British Museum on 1 February 1958, to our current position (c. 600 members) eagerly awaiting the second edition of *The Flora*. Beginning with the 1950s renaissance period of burgeoning interest in lichens, I found (as a relative newcomer) I was able to place in historical context many of the people I've come to know since joining the BLS. The *History of Fieldwork* also acknowledges the importance of diversity in the membership – from the taxonomists, only one or two each generation, to the nomadic fieldworkers, through the organizers, essential to the society's well-being, and the social members, essential to its outlook. The historical perspective outlined in the first chapter also points to the timeliness of a book that is essentially retrospective. The career of Oliver Gilbert spans a period during which the 'lean years' gave way to four decades of intense field activity by BLS members, fuelling immense advances in taxonomic understanding. At a point where the British Isles is on the brink of a second 'taxonomic impediment', such as preceded the inauguration of the BLS, and time simply getting to 'know' species through observational research is increasingly difficult to justify, this book provides an insight into a very special period in British lichenology – a period of discovery.

Chapter Two sketches examples of the various ways in which the BLS has contributed to the exploration of lichens. Key BLS themes are presented as accounts of specific excursions: an exploratory meeting (Lizard, Cornwall), a workshop (*Opegrapha*) and a piece about the highly effective churchyard group. The personal and social aspects of an involvement with lichens are represented as articles previously published in the BLS bulletin by Vanessa Winchester (social) and Alan Fryday (personal). However, the book is not an account of the BLS and Chapters Three through to Seven are dedicated to the author's more personal memories. These are arranged into themes, each chapter comprising an account of field excursions, and reflecting the author's development as a lichenologist (cf. the six stages of lichenology, evocatively summarized in Chapter Eight, the final chapter). Beginning with what the author himself terms 'adventure lichenology', Chapters Three and Four are dedicated to the exploration of islands ('*Island Years*') and '*The Mountains*', respectively. These chapters demonstrate the special capacity of the author for observational research in remote places. Chapter Five covers '*Neglected Habitats*' while the pace mellows during Chapters Six ('*Weekends Away*') and Seven ('*Days Out*'). The body of the book is about fieldwork. It is about the places the search for lichens takes a lichenologist: summer days in dappled woodlands, or their halcyon evenings on a Dorset heath, to isolated islands over storm-tossed seas and cold, wet mountain tops. The book is better for its many accompanying cameos, including a history of the people and dwellings of North Rona, a lighthouse mystery on the Flannan Isles, and even a somnambulant ghost. It is about the people that accompany a lichenologist: the friends, bonded by a common philosophy, chance acquaintances with the World's eccentric characters, or nobody! Those times spent alone, isolated in wonderful places. Finally, it is about the lichens: those bewilderingly various, multicoloured, obscure little creatures that the rest of the World walks past, though which hold us enthralled. Oliver Gilbert does them justice here.

The book may not stand up, entirely watertight, if subjected to a close, in-depth scrutiny. Book critics could no doubt find something to bother over. But that is not the point. It is a book to be treated kindly. Dip into the book over a bedtime glass of whisky and be transported with one of Britain's best-loved lichenologists to a remote patch of land in the distant Atlantic, or a snow-bed corrie in the western mountains.

**Christopher Ellis**

**Die Flechten Kärntens. Eine Bestandsaufnahme nach mehr als einem Jahrhundert lichenologischer Forschungen.** By R. Türk, J. Hafellner and C. Taurer-Zeiner. First Edition 2004. Klagenfurt: Naturwissenschaftlicher Verein für Kärnten. Sonderreihe Natur Kärnten, Band 2. Pp. 333, with 214 full colour Figures and 169 distribution maps. ISBN 3-85328-035-8. Price: softcover €19.50. E-mail orders: [nwv@landesmuseum-ktn.at](mailto:nwv@landesmuseum-ktn.at). doi:10.1017/S0024282905220029

Austria harbours a rich and varied lichen flora, which has attracted scientific attention for centuries. No comprehensive lichen flora exists, but it is well documented in checklists, bibliographies and floristic publications on specific regions. This new book is the first full-colour account for such a region. The region, Carinthia, borders Italy and Slovenia and ranges from lowland, nearly mediterranean to high alpine areas.

The book consists of three parts. The Introduction (34 pages) gives a simple guide to the morphological terms used, and some information about the region's ecology, with emphasis on the landscapes of Carinthia and its associated lichens. The history of the lichenological research, dating back to 1769, is treated briefly.

The main part of the book consists of the treatment of 169 lichen species, all of which are illustrated at least once amongst 214 excellent full-colour photographs. These illustrations are usually large (10 × 7 cm), facilitating the observation of small details and the colours are almost invariably good. Unfortunately a few are upside down (e.g. *Dermatocarpon luridum*). Most photographs have been taken in the field, so that the specimens look decidedly fresh. Distribution maps are given for all 169 species treated, usually based on recent (>1975) observations. The texts accompanying the species are rather informal, and meant to be easy-reading for non-specialists. Ecological details are given consistently for each species but entries for thallus characteristics are eclectic (e.g. a dimension or a colour of a lower surface; only rarely a chemical reaction) and comparisons with similar or related species are infrequent. Unfortunately, no indication is given of the scale

of illustrations. For instance, *Parmeliopsis ambigua* is illustrated with the lobes c. 1 cm wide, while the morphologically very similar *P. hyperopta* has its lobes after magnification c. 3 cm wide, making it at first glance reminiscent of *Hypotrachyna revoluta*. Although this is unlikely to present problems to the specialist, it will undoubtedly hamper the identification success by beginners. Maybe this can be remedied in the second edition. The selection of species is such, that it is useful for both beginners and specialists alike; the beginner will benefit from the inclusion of the more common and conspicuous species and the specialist will appreciate photographs of a number of species for which colour illustrations have not previously been published, such as three species of *Bellemerea*, *Bryonora castanea*, *Buellia elegans*, *Lecanora cavicola*, *L. orbicularis*, *L. salicicola*, *Rhizocarpon ridescens* and *Squammarina nivalis*.

The last part of the book is a comprehensive checklist, citing selected synonyms and all published references to Carinthian lichens. It runs for 111 pages, but contains a wealth of information, such as all the subspecific taxa accepted by the authors.

The authors, who are clearly experts in this difficult lichen flora, are to be congratulated for producing such a lucid and still comprehensive book, and at such a moderate price. It is a must for every lichenologist planning a trip to the Alps, and highly recommended for everybody who regularly identifies lichen specimens from boreo-alpine regions anywhere in the world.

**André Aptroot**

