

BOOK REVIEWS

Biodiversity and Domestication of Yams in West Africa: Traditional Practices Leading to Dioscorea rotundata Poir. By R. Dumont, A. Dansi, P. Vernier and J. Zoundjihékpon. Montpellier and Rome: CIRAD and IPGRI (2006), pp. 95, no price quoted. ISBN 9-782876-146327. doi:10.1017/S0014479707005649

This is a slim book, but the core text contains a lot of information and analysis. It is not a book to fill in all the gaps for those that know nothing about *Dioscorea* species, for there is not even a key to separate species and cultigens. It is nonetheless a fascinating account for tropical agriculturists, ethnobotanists and taxonomists. Whilst we are becoming increasingly aware that the division between 'wild' and cultivated plants is both blurred and often confusing, yams are surely one of the few plants where this interplay between wild, cultivated and 'feral' continues to occur, and indeed is incorporated into both folklore and good husbandry by farmers and not just researchers.

Neither is it an easy book to digest and it needed careful reading twice for this review. Practically every aspect of biology of the group of yam species to which the cultivated white yam (*Dioscorea rotundata*) belongs – be it genetic status, phenology and sexuality – is variable. Previous studies have highlighted this, but the different viewpoints have only added to the challenge facing the authors (and readers) of this book. You are left wishing for a simplified taxonomy, with wild and cultivated plants of white yam all under one species, together with some leads on further understanding the remarkable biology of the plant. However, this book gives the best understanding currently available for the unravelling of the story and is highly recommended.

Ian Martin

Drought Adaptation in Cereals. Edited by J-M Ribaut. New York: Food Products Press (2006), pp. 642, US\$89.95, ISBN-13: 978-1-56022-27-4 (hardbound), US\$69.95, ISBN-13: 978-1-56022-278-1 (softbound). doi:10.1017/S0014479707005650

The immediate reaction to this book, yet another physiological treatise on drought, was a sinking feeling. On the positive side, and there is a lot, there are two opening scene/issue setting chapters: one biological, one economic by authors of unquestionable authority. Also of merit are the individual chapters on barley, maize, rice, sorghum and wheat improvement. Drought physiology is over-emphasised, repetitive, contradictory and a failing. While there is a need to discuss physiological traits, it is not necessary in every chapter; the relevance of gene expression in *Arabidopsis* (a diploid species with no endosperm, the main target for yield in cereals) is questionable and 'What can we learn from resurrection plants?' – not a lot, at best an academic chapter with relevance to cereal production suffering its own drought. However, among the dross are some jewels, e.g. wheat breeding for drought using a physiological screen. The book arrives in an era when genomics and physiology are primed for joint analysis. The integration of these disciplines is weak, e.g. physiological ventures into QTL analysis (a very imprecise form of genetics) and geneticists venturing into comparative and functional genomics with little field relevance. Instead of embracing each other, the sparks of friction highlight the persisting gulf. Physiologists and geneticists need to be dragged into the field with breeders and agronomists to work collectively on relevant germplasm; ironically, this was a rallying call of the Prologue. In conclusion, selective reading is advised.

Brian Forster

Producing Table Olives. By S. Kailis and D. Harris. Collingwood, Victoria, Australia: Landlinks Press (2006), pp. 328, \$A69.95. ISBN-978-0-643092-03-7. doi:10.1017/S0014479707005662

The authors, with special interest in quality aspects of olives and food safety respectively, see opportunity for an Australian table olive production and processing industry, for a retail market currently valued at \$A40m