

NEW BOOK ON ST HELENA FLORA NOT INTENDED JUST FOR BOTANISTS

by Trevor W. Hearl

You don't have to be a botanist to enjoy *The Endemic Flora of St Helena: A Struggle for Survival*. It is a 44-page study, packaged in striking red covers with Roman and italic gilt lettering, featuring the 25 flowering plants and ferns that occur naturally nowhere but on St Helena.

Each plant is expertly described in layman's language and also meticulously illustrated by the drawings of Muriel Williams, headmistress of Jamestown Infants' School or Richard Gillett of the Agricultural & Forestry Department. Other brief articles provide the historical setting to today's conservation problems, with a folding map showing the vegetation zones in colour; give details of extinct plants and the new redwood ebony hybrid; and trace current progress in conservation.

And what a remarkable story this has been, of a fight against the odds to save St Helena from becoming literally a desert island, with the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew playing a leading role. Living proof of just how remarkable a story it is stands before me in my study in the shape of two sturdy St Helena ebony plants, a species believed by experts to be extinct for over one hundred years.

But in November, 1980 two bushes were discovered on a remote cliff by George Benjamin, now supervisor of endemics, and Quentin Crank of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, working under auspices of the World Wildlife Fund. Both are contributors to this splendid little book, as are Douglas MacDonald, science master at the Secondary Selective School and Michael Holland, Agriculture & Forestry officer, who is also the editor.

This praiseworthy publication, elegantly produced despite the Colony's lack of printing resources, is surely layman's literature at its best and St Helena can be proud of it.

South Atlantic Chronicle, July 1988, Vol. XII, Nos. 2-3, p. 18.

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