Book Reviews


Lloyd H. Shinners (1918–71) has been described as “one of the strongest and most interesting workers in the entire field of systematic botany in the United States.” An ambitious, complex, and many-faceted character, Shinners believed that nothing worthwhile was ever achieved without pain. A tireless worker, he added numerous specimens to the herbarium of Southern Methodist University that now forms the nucleus of the Botanical Institute of Texas (BKIT) in Fort Worth, and was a major player in the understanding of the extensive Texas flora. (Some of his students are presently involved with systematic studies of that flora.) An excellent teacher, he championed the cause of botany in general and classical taxonomy in particular.

Much of Shinners’ biography is told in his own words, from letters, journal articles, notes, and other materials obtained by the author. His life spanned the time when plant taxonomy in the United States was undergoing fundamental changes, and the people involved in those changes were his friends and acquaintances. He corresponded with many of these scientists, and, as someone who entered taxonomy near the end of Shinners’ career, it is of personal interest for me to read about the lives of these individuals.

Certain colleagues and students found Dr. Shinners to be a loyal friend who was generous and eager to be of help. He also was a rude complainer, a troublemaker, and a self-promoter who antagonized others.

This biography is truly enjoyable reading and gives great insight into the life of an important plant taxonomist of the twentieth century.

—JOHN E. ERINGER, Emeritus Professor of Botany, Eastern Illinois University, Charleston, IL 61920.


Billie Turner et al. have here produced a detailed, thorough set of maps that is absolutely invaluable to the Texas botanist, and quite necessary for phytogeographers and other botanists elsewhere. This work draws heavily upon Turner’s extensive floristic and systematic experience over the past half century, and neatly synthesizes much of the important data from two herbaria, LL-TEX and SRSC. Indeed, possessing these volumes is like having a scale (about 1:18,000,000; six maps per page) that is very useful to the reader, and is well chosen to give good resolution without making the book three (or even six) times as lengthy. The taxa are indicated for each map without authority, a fact that bothered one colleague. However, the wide availability of this information online (e.g., www.ipni.org) should make this a non-issue. Additionally, any new combinations from these volumes are summarized on pp. 4–8. Infraspecific taxa are detailed with separate symbols on the same map. Although close scrutiny is sometimes required to resolve the distributions (as in Cercidium texanum, p. 315), the phytogeographic significance of infraspecific intermediate collections is well presented by this technique. Examples include Astragalus australis (p. 307) and Salvia farinacea (p. 411), both of which show apparent clinal variation between varieties by this presentation.

A stated purpose of this work (p. 9) is to document the arrival and spread of non-native floristic elements in Texas, and the maps do this well. Certain specimens of note, due to their disjunction or rarity, have cited vouchers or literature references listed also. One such example is Symphoricarpos occidentalis, recently reported to occur in far north Texas (Simpson 1991). Additionally, the books are useful as a determiner of reported noteworthy disjunctions (e.g., Cupressus arizonica [Karges and Zech 2001, 2003]).

The covers’ designs are well-chosen enough to qualify as an inside joke, with both volumes depicting habitat and detail of plants recognized by the Texas legislature as symbolic of that state’s flora: Lupinus texensis (Fabaceae) and Bouteloua curtipendula (Poaceae). In the case of Lupinus, residents of central and east Texas are quite familiar with the ubiquitous portraits and landscapes depicting fields of bluebonnets, often with family members or advertised commodities featured as a foreground. Turner’s Atlas is one of few works that co-opts this flower with real relevance. I am not sure if this was done with conscious irony or not, but the effect gives the informed reader deep chuckles.

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