The Field Guide to Manzanitas by Kauffmann et al. ushers in a refreshing approach to botanical field guides. Like the nascent inflorescences of manzanitas bursting into flower after their long wait, the field guide is a bundle of knowledge that electrifies the reader and inspires the user. It was conceived, designed, and written in such a way to guarantee you will fall in love with manzanitas and become knowledgeable about their biogeography and identification. It is a field botanist’s dream!

The field guide is so thoughtfully and carefully formatted that your enjoyment and increased wisdom is certain. The main section of the guide is titled Manzanita Treatments where all 105 taxa in the genus Arctostaphylos are discussed in alphabetical order to make quick reference and rapid assessment easy. Each species is given one page (Species Plate) with more pages allocated to subspecies. Everything you need to identify your specimen is right there on the page including the essential range maps. Each species is illustrated with three or four defining images with clear and precisely worded captions so that you see exactly what you need for identification.

This allows character comparisons of all manzanita species. Using comparable characters in keys and field treatments is an excellent means to convey identifiable traits that may be necessary to separate species and are especially important in manzanitas where many species often grow together. A few brief descriptive words are used after each character type. While manzanita identification isn’t rocket science, this consistent approach enabling us to tease out the character differences is superb.

The Manzanita Characters section includes vivid illustrations, photographs, and explanations to illuminate the important variation on key characteristics like stems, burls, leaves, fruits and inflorescences. Throughout the book, you become enlightened with exquisite photographic images of bark and burls, colorful flowers and fruits, bracts and hairs. Hairs with or without glands and images of leaves carefully show their shape and basal outline, while highlighting whether they are auriculate (heart-shaped) or truncate, for example. The images and character descriptions are displayed in a consistent and comparative style that allows you to readily differentiate one species from another. These are presented with habitat and plant community associations, gorgeous landscape imagery, detailed range maps, and more.

There are other marvelous features in the Field Guide to Manzanitas that fulfill a field botanists dream. The authors state that their purpose in this field guide is to “lift the veil” on this quintessentially California shrub. Ecology and evolution is thoughtfully addressed. Arctostaphylos evolved with the California Floristic Province with unusually high local endemism driven by harsh conditions, poor, low nutrient soils, and the eventuality of fire. The story of diversification began some 110 million years ago during the late Cretaceous with the emergence of the Ericaceae and subsequent lineages springing forth. The ecology section describes the influence of fire and smoke, the importance of mycorrhizal fungi, and describes dispersal where rodents are the key agents. Just before the Manzanita Treatments another field botanist dream is realized through Regional Keys focusing on the California Floristic Province, divided into the Klamath Mountains, the San Francisco Bay, the Central Coast, the Sierra Nevada, the Southern California, the Baja California, and Outside of the California Floristic Province.

The Field Guide to Manzanitas is an essential contribution to California botany and field guides. The story of the authors coming together is filled with interesting chance events and meetings that led to the making of the guide. It was during one of these chance events that the photographer, Jeff Bisbee, put his tracking sights and photographic talents to the genus Arctostaphylos. Before manzanitas, Jeff worked many years tracking and photographing conifers throughout Mexico and elsewhere in Western North America. On one occasion when Jeff was speaking on Mexican conifers at UC Santa Cruz he decided to visit the Santa Cruz Cypress population on Butano Ridge. He asked for local help to gain shorter access through locked gates and it was on this occasion that he met Mike Vasey. Mike and Jeff drove together to the trailhead and during their short two-hour drive a new manzanita-tracking project was born. Over