

PREFACE

The Macaronesian region comprises the archipelagos of the Azores, Madeira, the Salvages, the Canaries and the Cape Verdes and has attracted the attention of botanists because of the uniqueness and diversity of the flora. Madeira is especially interesting since it contains some of the most extensive and best preserved natural vegetation remaining in Macaronesia. It also has a long history of species introductions from all over the world and is increasingly popular with visitors who are attracted by the wealth of plants to be seen there.

Extensive botanical collecting in the Madeiran archipelago began in the mid-eighteenth century and the flora is reasonably well-known although some inaccessible areas would bear further investigation. Rock-ledges in the high central peaks, the large valley of the Ribeira de Janela in the north-west of the island and some of the coastal cliffs and gorges have all recently yielded new records or confirmations of old ones known from only one or very few collections. Many populations of endemic species are very small, making every new additional record valuable.

It is 70 years since any comprehensive work devoted to the flora of the Madeiran islands has been produced and the excellent, recent checklists for Macaronesia by Hansen & Sunding (1985, 1991) have emphasized the need for a new *Flora* incorporating the considerable advances in our knowledge of botany in this area. The Natural History Museum has a long tradition of interest in the Macaronesian Islands and the compilation of the *Flora of Madeira* was undertaken there by the European Plant Information Centre (EPIC). Many individuals, both inside and outside the Museum, have contributed to the *Flora* and we are grateful for all their efforts.

This book aims to provide a concise yet comprehensive guide encompassing all of the wild (i.e. native and naturalized) vascular flora known to occur in the Madeiran and Salvage Islands and will be of use to anyone with an interest in the botany of the region. English was chosen as the most appropriate language in part for the convenience of the authors but principally to make the *Flora* accessible to the widest possible audience.

The *Flora of Madeira* draws heavily on the works of previous Madeiran botanists, in whose debt we remain. We hope our work will prove to be a valuable and informative addition to Madeiran and Macaronesian literature.

JRP
MJS