

PREFACE

The *Plants of China* was conceived of, and has been developed as, a companion publication to the *Flora of China*, the remarkable international project which has so successfully completed an English-language revision of the *Flora Republicae Popularis Sinicae* through the efforts of 470 scientists around the world. As anticipated, this task required 25 years of research. With its descriptions of over 31 000 species of plants, the *Flora of China* stands as a high point in modern floristic botany. It was one of the first projects of its kind to use the internet to share information as widely as possible, including to those who might never have access to the hard-copy books themselves.

The completion of the *Flora of China* comes at a pivotal point in history, a time when we have finally come fully to appreciate the fundamental importance of biodiversity in sustaining human lives. Plants have long been taken for granted but we now understand that we neglect them at our peril. They are the base of our food chain and provide the essential ecosystem services that both created and maintain the biosphere. Now that the biodiversity crisis has the attention of governments and people around the world we can fully appreciate the vision and leadership of Peter Raven and WU Cheng-Yih (WU Zheng-Yi) for conceiving the *Flora of China* project and bringing it to fruition. We thank them for their inspirational leadership and note with regret

the recent passing of WU Cheng-Yih (WU Zheng-Yi).

The purpose of this book, as a companion to the *Flora of China*, is to provide a synthesis of the wider knowledge concerning the plants of China. It does so through a series of chapters written by appropriate experts in their respective fields. It also aims to provide a route into the wider botanical literature of the subject, including a great many standard reference works published in China that are less well-known internationally than they deserve to be. In this way we hope that, like the *Flora of China* itself, this book can serve as a bridge between nations. We thank the scientists who have contributed to it for sharing their expertise. We extend a special thanks for the financial support. We are grateful to the National Natural Science Foundation of China (39899400), Chinese Academy of Sciences (KSCX2-SW-122 & KSCX2-YW-Z-0901), and Ministry of Science and Technology of China (2006FY120100).

Extensive though this volume is, it scarcely does justice to either the importance or the vast diversity of the plants of China. It is our hope, nevertheless, that it will serve to excite interest in the subject and we hope that you, the reader, will enjoy the opportunity to visit China and to study its plants. Few opportunities can be more rewarding.

HONG De-Yuan and Stephen Blackmore
Beijing and Edinburgh