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Edited by

G. KUNKEL



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PREFACE

When asked by the General Editor to prepare a book-length treatment concerning the nature of the Canary Islands, our aims were rather ambitious. A general monograph was to be written, embracing all the disciplines of natural history applicable to these islands, and over twenty scientists were approached for contributions. However scientists are 'time machines'; our proposed list of contents has changed a good many times. Cooperation of other authors was gained and, finally, a fairly rounded project appeared revealing different and lesser known aspects of Canary Island Nature.

Since Centuries the Canary Islands have attracted the attention of travellers. Earliest reports may be traced back some two thousand years but real scientific investigation began about 1800, the time of Alexander von Humboldt and his visit to the islands; older reports are scarce, sometimes rather confusing because of geographic inaccuracies. But the 19th Century will remain as the century of fundamental explorations, connected with names such as Leopold von Buch, F. C. MacGregor, Sabin Berthelot, Philip Barker Webb, J. Viera y Clavijo, F. von Fritsch, C. Bolle, D. H. Christ, O. Simony, G. Hartung, H. Mayer etc., all familiar and intimately connected with our knowledge of the natural history of the archipelago. Even the much criticised Ernst Haeckel has provided us with lively descriptions of his visit to one of the 'Fortunate Islands'.

The 20th Century brought new interest, new fields to be explored, and new expeditions to the islands. Hundreds of books and papers appeared, especially in Central and Northern Europe, dealing with plant life and birds, vulcanism, history, insects, reptiles, winds, adventures and so forth of the Canaries. The Jet-age, with modern tourism and related facilities has followed, opening the islands to short-term visitors and causing a flood of new investigation, with their respective publications. Almost every aspect of science has been scrutinized and many new data have come to light. I may state that during the last 25 years more has been published about these islands than during the time between Von Humboldt's visit (in 1799) and 1950.

Talking about plants for example (being a botanist myself), a good many of our endemic species were already known to Linnaeus, who gave them their (partly still valid) specific name and provided foundations for future research. The Canary Islands house about 1.750 different species of vascular plants (adventitious species and occasional garden

escapes included), of which over 550 taxa are recognized as Canarian endemics, and almost a hundred of these were only discovered during the last 25 years. Another, equally interesting field – entomology – shows similar or even more exciting figures, and entomological investigations might be considered to have a promising future ahead. New roads now give access to little known localities, new researchers have found new methods of investigation, and new schools of thought cause profound changes in established scientific view-points. – The Canary Islands are well explored now; however, they are still not exhausted . . .

Although our book cover only part of the vast natural mosaic of these islands, we hope it may help to fill some of those, before-mentioned gaps. And with this I wish to thank my colleagues and contributors for their efforts which have made this volume possible. My wife Mary Anne has given much help with proof-reading and in the preparation of the register, and many corrections are due to her revisions. I express my thanks to Prof. J. Illies, for his valuable suggestions, and we all may express our gratitude to Dr. W. Junk, Publishers, for showing so much interest in a book concerning the nature of our islands. Finally, I would like to add that English is not the mother tongue for most of us authors; however in order to comply with the Publisher's request we have tried our best and we hope to be forgiven for any linguistic peculiarities.

G. Kunkel