

pose some problems for those using the book for the first time when they are familiar with the old order, but with use this should readily be overcome. Throughout the text the user will find that some additional species are included, the occasional genus has been split, and that in many of the species descriptions additional information has been provided along with a general polishing of the text. In part for this, Dr. Cronquist acknowledges the help of a

large number of individuals in the Preface, but the production of such a volume as this is a monumental task, and Dr. Cronquist is to be congratulated for having brought this most useful work to completion.

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## Common Poisonous Plants and Mushrooms of North America

By N. J. Turner and A. F. Szczawinski. 1991. Timber Press, Portland, Oregon. xv + 311 pp., illus. U.S. \$55.

A thoughtfully prepared, nicely presented book on a topic which has been quite prominent in recent years. The information on various types of poisoning, various types of plants and mushrooms that cause poisoning, various types of treatments for poisoning, and various related topics is well organized. From the book's beginning with "What to do in case of poisoning" and "How to prevent poisoning", both sections of a couple of pages, to the final sections on "Honey poisonings" and "Some medicinal herbs of questionable safety" there is a wealth of pertinent and fascinating information.

The main chapters are (a) the introduction to poisonous plants, (b) poisonous mushrooms, (c) poisonous plants of wild areas, (d) poisonous garden and crop plants, and (e) poisonous house plants and

plant products. Most of the plants and mushrooms discussed are illustrated in colour. The 215 colour pictures are good but some of the mushroom photographs are tinted an atypical pink. The format for each plant or mushroom is consistent and composed of the following: common name and family, scientific name and family, quick check, description, occurrence, toxicity, treatment, and notes.

The authors designed a book "intended for parents, hikers, wild food enthusiasts, and health care workers in poison control centres" and I believe they have succeeded most admirably. It is a good book to browse through and to gain a better understanding of that plant that lurks next to the piano.

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## ENVIRONMENT

### Extinction, Bad Genes or Bad Luck?

By David M. Raup. 1991. W. W. Norton, New York. 210 pp., illus.

The ball began to roll in earnest in 1980 when physical evidence pointed the finger at an extraterrestrial object as the cause of the extinction event 65 million years ago which included our favourite fossil forms, the dinosaurs among others. David Raup, a statistical paleontologist with the University of Chicago has produced the latest volume in the field and, unlike his earlier book, *The Nemesis Affair* which was more of a personal journal of his involvement of the developing scenarios of extraterrestrial causes of extinction and the "ways of science", Raup's latest book involves the understanding of biostatistics.

By using biostatistics (as frightening as this word may sound to the general reader, Raup is very careful not to lose the reader in numbers), Raup is able to show that the other side of evolution, extinction,

is not a signal of failure but merely a component that "adds another element to the evolutionary process." As well, the early record of life shows that species start out in small numbers and, because of this small population, are easy to wipe out by natural causes. Species that are widely distributed have more strength against extinction because natural causes are often not global. However, as seen in the geological past, global events have indeed happened and a catastrophic event previously not experienced by the species could cause such an extinction. This is the "bad luck." Massive extinctions in the past showed no preference to their victims: they transcend all ecological boundaries.

The modern analogy of the heath hen is an important symbol in two respects: the impact our species has on the biosphere and as a comparative tool. The geographic range of this bird was relatively large prior to human territorial expansion and hunting. These circumstances are what Raup calls the "first



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