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Finally, a comprehensive work on the páramo plant diversity is available in a checklist form. The need of this type of publication is increasingly acknowledged by the growing number of professionals interested in biodiversity. Indeed, despite its clearly aligned botanical audience, the book can serve to a greater readership because it touches the páramos from different aspects.

It not only presents the alphabetical list of circa 4700 vascular (3399) and non-vascular (1298) plant species to be found in the páramos and associated data - including author, collector and collection site, but it also presents a comprehensive literature review of the state of the knowledge about this important part of the northern Andes, a comprehensive gazetteer of páramo localities in Costa Rica, Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador and Peru, and a rich bibliographic reference of more than 1570 published works of páramo literature, albeit botanical in nature, but pertaining to 19 different topic areas.

I will yield the analysis of botanical nature for the experts in the field, for whom this book is an essential reference, who may find in Luteyn's contribution a remarkable achievement of synthesis of more than two decades of scholarly work in the field. Himself an authority on Ericaceae, his knowledge of the broader páramo flora is very impressive and deserves the recognition that the New York Botanical Garden has offered him and his contributors in producing this elegant hard-copy of its series Memoirs (Núm. 84), with color plates, black and white photographs, maps, and tables printed in fine paper. An impeccable book, indeed. Considering the dedication to the work of two important late Andeanists, Luis Ruiz (Venezuelan professor in Mérida) and José Cuatrecasas (Spanish scholar in the Smithsonian, the "father of modern páramo studies"), the book starts, as if were, with the right footing. Their views of the Venezuelan and Colombian highlands are revered by most of the followers of botanical work in páramos, for whom the inclusion of rare pictures of "Don José" taken in the late 30's and 40's, show a glimpse of the reality of today localities. My eyes of a much more verdant Ecuadorian reality with a much
The book presents several fronts of potentially useful research that require further work. Starting with the name of “páramo” itself, and the lack of local toponimy -in contrast with Jalca and Puna, and ending with the lack of distinction between localities such as “altos, filos, cadenas, cerros, lomas, sierras, páramos o lagunas”, there are many veneers to tackle in relation to the terminology of the Tropandean ecoregion. The same is true for the correct evaluation and assessment of available resources in both market and non-market values, of most environmental services provided by the páramos. The scientific challenge of linking plant lists of phenological taxonomy with a more advanced genetic or biochemical systematics is even a greater ambition. Let’s not forget that páramos have always been important in the domestication and radiation of subspecies created by faster mutations responding to the stronger UV-B radiation of the high altitude locations and the perpetual interception of cloudiness and production of liquid water.

I think the biggest contribution of the book is Luteyn’s clear spelling of the challenges ahead for the future of the páramos, arguing them from scientific,
economic, educational and ecological approaches of conservation of these man-aged highlands. Its call for governments and NGOs to “preserve and restore the páramo to the state they were observed…” is a major appeal. It is also important to rescue the spirit of the contribution as a result of the author’s “labor of love” to the páramo as a living working landscape. I am sure the readers will share the emotion and the motivation to reach for further understanding of the area. I am already awaiting the publication of the full flora offered as a follow-up.

Notes to readers


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