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Plant Identification for the Rio Grande
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PLANT IDENTIFICATION FOR THE RIO GRANDE DELTA

Plants of The Rio Grande Delta. Alfred Richardson. 1990, revised edition 1995. University of Texas Press, Austin. 332 pages plus 94 color plates. \$45.00 (cloth), \$24.95 (paper).

The Rio Grande Delta of Texas is one of the most diverse ecological areas in Texas. The area is favorite among ornithologists due to the presence of many species that winter there or migrate through the area. Similarly, the Delta harbors several rare mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and a host of invertebrates, which are found nowhere else in North America. Most ecologists attribute this unique faunal diversity to the great variety of vegetation that characterizes the Rio Grande Delta. Accurately identifying the vegetation is therefore an important aspect of field research performed in the region.

Numerous plant identification guides relevant to the vegetation of South Texas are available. Alfred Richardson mentions a few of these. However, he makes it clear from the outset that his book is relevant to the vegetation of the three Texas counties that comprise the majority of the Rio Grande Delta. Although the book would be useful for identifying vegetation from more northerly counties in the Rio Grande Plains and Gulf prairies and marshes, biologists are advised instead to consult more comprehensive references such as the *Manual of the Vascular Plants of Texas*; *Trees, Shrubs and Woody Vines of the Southwest*; *The Grasses of Texas*; or another identification manual more specific to their region of interest.

In general the text is well written and I found no typographical errors. The author gives clear and concise instructions on how to use the book. Illustrations of plant anatomy and leaf margins are simple and concise, clearly labeled, and easy to understand. The text accompanying each illustration is also clear and to the point. The reader should have no difficulty in identifying flower parts and leaf characteristics in the field. Instructions on how to use the keys (page 3) are a bit vague, and may confuse readers who are not biological professionals. As a simple exercise, I selected several genera common to both the Rio Grande Delta and southeastern Arizona where I live and used the manual in an attempt to key out mesquite, Russian thistle, and tasajillo to genera. I encountered little difficulty in doing so. The keys are well constructed, easy to understand, and easy to use.

In addition, the book is technically correct and yields accurate results if used correctly. In my view, the most valuable contribution the *Plants of the Rio Grande Delta* makes to natural resource conservation is to permit individuals who have no formal training in botany or life sciences to become more aware and concerned about the ecosystem in which they live.—*William P. Kuvlesky, Jr., U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge, P.O. Box 109, Sasabe, AZ 85633.*