

RECENSIES – REVIEWS – COMPTES RENDUS

How to live and survive in Zambezian open forest (Miombo ecoregion)*François Malaisse*

Les presses agronomiques de Gembloux
Gembloux, 2010

Great! Lovely! What a read! This is indeed a very well-documented book written by a very knowledgeable author on an applied ethnobiological topic he knows so well from his own experience (having lived in the area for 20 years), and from a multitude of literature references which he knows how to interpret and use. All in all, more than a thousand edible products are presented and discussed. Their phenology, and ecology are presented together with the nutritional values. Important technical terms are explained and presented in a scholarly manner, so that even the relative layperson should be able to follow all that is presented.

The book starts with giving the background, and presenting the setting and context of the survival handbook. The miombo vegetation is presented in its climatological and broad environmental context, whereas the people living there are also briefly presented. Then follows an extensive presentation of the different survival foods that the miombo can offer: fungi, plants (including ferns), honey, greater mammals, rodents, birds, fish, reptiles, caterpillars, termites, other insects and other animals are extensively listed and documented. At the end, beverages and salt are also added. The book ends with a brief presentation of the area's ethnoecology (which gives a synthetic presentation of the different timber uses for a number of important shrubs and trees) and traditional agriculture practiced in the area (with an emphasis on maize and cassava). A synthesis/conclusion finally summarizes what was presented throughout.

The figures and tables, and iconography in the book are supported by a CD that comes with the book and has more than 380 colour photographs that are arranged by chapter in the book, and has two identification keys, one for mushrooms, and one for edible caterpillars.

This English version is an update of an earlier French version that has been reviewed and enlarged, taking into account recent progress in knowledge on the species dealt with. Our only criticism has indeed to do with the English. The translation is sometimes too literal and thus not always too correct, nor is the language fluid enough.

A must-read for students of ethnobotany and the public at large interested in surviving in a southern African savannah area!

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