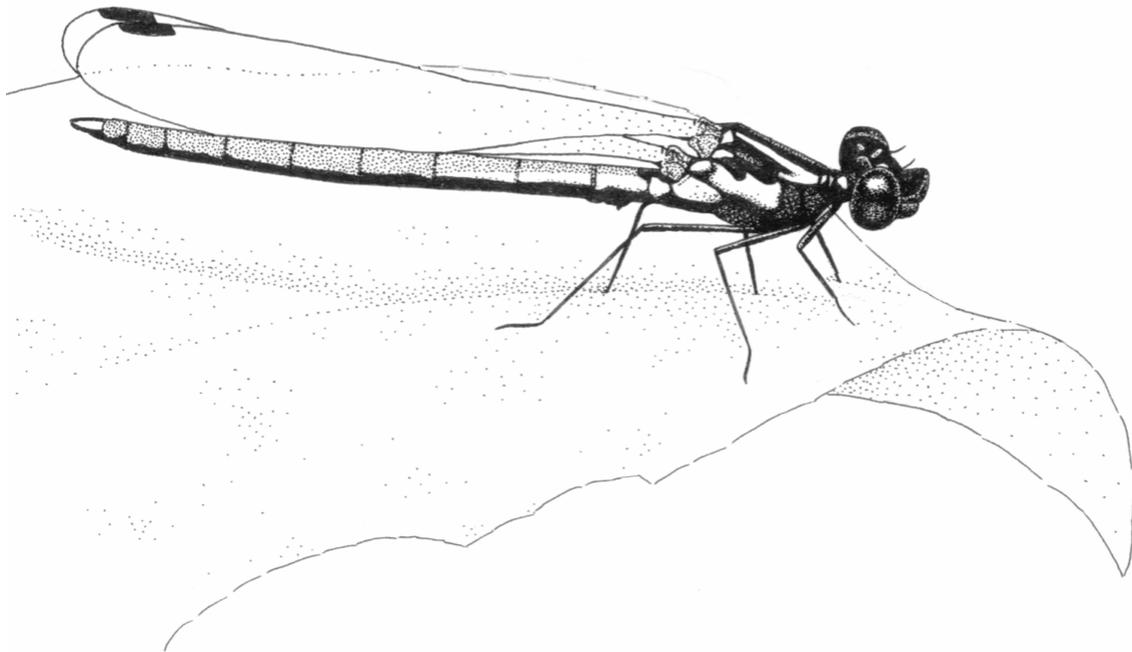


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Front cover: Chlorocypha tenuis, a species of damselfly found in Kakamega Forest. Drawing by K.-D. B. Dijkstra.



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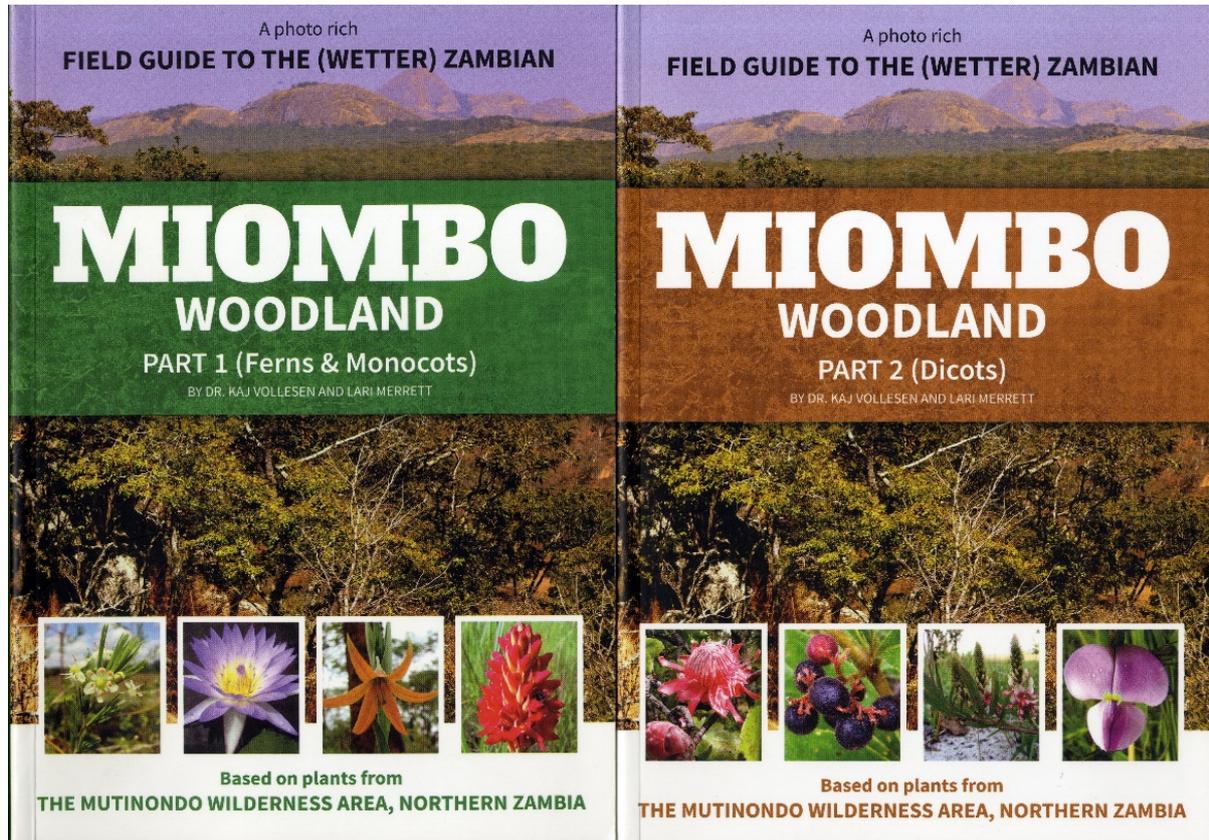


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WHERE HERITAGE LIVES ON

BOOK REVIEW

A Field Guide to the (wetter) Zambian Miombo Woodland, Part 1 (Ferns & Monocots) & Part 2 (Dicots).
By Kaj Vollesen & Lari Merrett. Privately published, 2020. Pp 1020, illustrated. ISBN 978-1-949677-20-1 (Soft Cover). Available from e.g. Mike Park Books or Natural History Book Service (UK and rest of the world excl. Africa; £120), Silverhill Seeds and Books (Africa; ZAR 2645) and Bookworld (Zambia).



Miombo woodlands cover an estimated 3.6 million square kilometres of south-central and eastern Africa. They form a broad belt from Angola in the east to Tanzania in the west. Kaj Vollesen and Lari Merret have published a fantastic book that will help to identify the rich miombo plant diversity. Even though this lavishly illustrated field guide is "based on the plants from the Mutinondo Wilderness Area, Northern Zambia", it will be extremely useful in a much wider geographical area.

I had the pleasure of visiting the Mutinondo Wilderness Area in early 2018. Nicholas Wightman and I were on our way to northern Zambia when Nick suggested to make Mutinondo our first evening stop after leaving Lusaka. Unfortunately, we could only spend the next morning looking around, but the contagious enthusiasm of Lari Merrett and the stunning plant richness, made me decide to come back even before I left. Then came covid, which thwarted my plans...for now, as I will go back, with this guide in hand.

The book starts with a foreword by Noah Zimba, and an introduction by Paul Smith, the secretary general of the Forestry Institute of Zambia and of Botanic Gardens Conservation International respectively. Lari Merret then presents a general, as well as a botanical background to Mutinondo. I like the picture of Mike Merrett, Colin Congdon and Ivan Bampton showing their harvest of huge specimens of *Termitomyces* mushrooms...exhibited next to a crate of beer. One wonders what their most important find was on that day. That we shouldn't take the bountifulness of wet miombo woodland for granted is explained by Lari in a chapter on the fast deforestation in Zambia.

Before the descriptions start in earnest, there is a section on finding your way around the book and the order in which the various vascular plant families are organised. This mostly follows APGIV although with some simplifications. Unlike most floristic treatments, which use a dichotomous key to get to the plant of

interest, "Miombo Woodland" uses an eye or photographic key. The plant world is subdivided in arbitrary subgroups (*e.g.* "distinctive fruit of trees and shrubs" or "flowers of herbs and subshrubs") and for each of the subgroups a representative picture lets the user identify the genus of interest. Flower examples are organised by colour and then alphabetically, which will allow for a fairly quick zooming-in on the potential genus of interest. Whereas this system of identification is far from perfect, it avoids having to plough through step after step of botanical jargon and getting lost along the way. It will also (unconsciously) start creating mind pictures of all the different genera which will allow the user to start recognising plants in the field.

For every family and genus, there is a short non-technical description of its essential diagnostic features. Large families and large genera are further split into smaller groups based on shared features. Each species description includes habit, key characteristics (underlined), other prominent characteristics, distribution, habitat, altitude, flowering season and an explanation of the origin of the name. All species are illustrated with sometimes up to eight pictures that clearly show the diagnostic features. There is the occasional quirky entry *e.g.* on page 593 there is a recipe for *mfungo* jelly (based on the fruits of *Anisophyllea pomifera*) and on page 720 you will find a recipe on how to prepare a healthy pigweed dish (based on *Amaranthus hybridus*).

Each of the two volumes ends with a glossary, a bibliography, photo credits and an index to the common names separated from an index to the scientific names.

"Miombo Woodland" includes 143 different families, 611 different genera and 1634 species. It is a monumental contribution to African botany that will stand the tooth of time and should be part of the library of every naturalist with an interest in Africa. Include a new backpack when you order this book as the two volumes weigh just under 2.7 kg.

Benny Bytebier