

## BOOK REVIEW

EMILY B. SESSA. 2024. **Ferns, Spikemosses, Clubmosses, and Quillworts of Eastern North America.** (ISBN-13: 978-0-691-21945-5, flexbound). Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton, New Jersey 08540, U.S.A. (**Orders:** <https://press.princeton.edu/>). \$29.95 US, 527 pp., color throughout, distribution maps, 6" × 8.25".

I have had the pleasure of knowing Dr. Emily Sessa, the author of this extraordinary field guide, for over 15 years. Our paths first crossed at a field course on Tropical Ferns and Lycophytes in Costa Rica, sponsored by the Organization for Tropical Studies. Since then, we have regularly seen each other at botanical conferences, workshops, and American Fern Society meetings, among others. When I learned that Emily was embarking on the ambitious project of writing this book, I was both amazed and thrilled. Creating a comprehensive guide covering such an extensive region—from Peninsular Florida and the outer southern coastal plains to the central United States, the northern Midwest, the Northeast, and Canada—is a big task, and Emily has accomplished it with remarkable skill and dedication.

In 2023, during the Botanical Society of America meetings in Boise, Idaho, Emily shared with us some of her field stories while working on the book. She even showed us some of the pages she was proofreading, and I was struck by the sheer amount of work and passion she had poured into this project. Now, holding the finished book in my hands, I can say that my excitement was well-founded.

Upon opening the book, the first thing that captivated me was its color photographs. Flipping through the pages, I was amazed by the habitat shots, the detailed leaf plates, and the scanning electron microscope images—all presented with such aesthetic beauty and scientific accuracy. These visuals alone make the book a treasure, but I was also delighted by the thoughtful organization and user-friendly design.

The introductory chapters are particularly well-crafted, offering a warm and accessible entry into the world of ferns. They cover the basics of fern biology, provide tips on identification, and include a brief glossary. For those who are new to ferns, this is an excellent starting point, while long-time enthusiasts and botanists will appreciate the concise and informative content.

One feature I found especially helpful are the indented keys, with the first (and sometimes distant) couplets highlighted. This design allows readers to navigate the key with ease, ensuring that even beginners can confidently find their way. Additionally, the updated reticulograms—showing the latest understanding of hybridization and polyploidy in certain groups—are a valuable tool for those interested in the evolutionary history of these plants. The brief descriptions of genera are another great feature, providing key information on how to recognize them.

To me, delving into the pages of this photographic field guide feels like taking a virtual field trip across eastern North America, with a special focus on ferns and lycophytes. The richness of the photographs, from broad habitat views, to individual plants, to sporangia close-ups, transports you directly to the field, offering a vivid experience of the flora in this region.

In addition to these highlights, the book includes detailed range maps, comprehensive species descriptions, and a checklist by region of all 305 species covered—244 ferns and 61 lycophytes. The index, featuring both common and scientific names as well as synonyms, is particularly useful, allowing readers to easily locate specific plants and stay up to date with changes in taxonomy.

If you have a passion for plants and a love for exploration, this is the book to add to your collection in 2024. Emily Sessa's book not only reminds us of the diversity, beauty, and importance of ferns and lycophytes but also deepens our understanding of these fascinating plant groups inspiring a greater appreciation for the natural world and the urgent need to conserve it.

#### About the author:

**Emily B. Sessa, Ph.D.**, is a botanist with more than 15 years of experience studying the ecology and evolution of ferns and lycophytes. She is the Patricia K. Holmgren Director of the William and Lynda Steere Herbarium at The New York Botanical Garden, the largest herbarium in the Western Hemisphere, and a former president of the American Fern Society.

—Alejandra Vasco, Research Botanist, Botanical Research Institute of Texas,  
Fort Worth, Texas, U.S.A. 76107-3400, U.S.A.