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That this book exists as more than a pipedream is hard to believe. But it is real, and it is probably the most useful book ever published on the diversity of organisms.

Every family and higher taxon of recent organisms is supposed to be treated. Yes, every one, and almost all do have an individual short article to themselves. Even viruses, whatever their families may mean. The articles are mostly 100 to 500 words each and give the taxon's major characters, a review of its way of life, ecological and geographical distribution, and number of genera and species. A couple of references and often a figure or two are appended, and alternative viewpoints are often mentioned. There is a convenient summary classification at the end (again with all families of organisms except a few apparently omitted by editorial error) and an immense index.

The book itself is immense. It is composed of two very large volumes, weighs almost a tenth of what I do, and has more than 2550 pages, each with twice the number of words (or the equivalent) as, say, the American Naturalist. The authors range from competent to the best in the groups I have some familiarity with. Most of the figures (variously line drawings or photographs) are good and some are of artistic quality. They, and the book, are not meant for identification of unknowns. The ratio of information to space is high. There is supposed to be some original work but I didn't find any in the sections I could evaluate.

There are some problems. Most of the primitive insects (the entire orders Protura, Diplura, and Collembola) are completely missing, apparently because the coordinator for insects didn't regard them as insects and the coordinator for other arthropods did. Lichens are also omitted, as are individual treatments of a few of the families of parasitic Crustacea. And someone (I hope not the author of the article) seems to have thought hippopotami are mice or something and changed the family name to Hippopotamyidae. Otherwise, one will always find things to quibble over, like an outmoded classification of the bacteria or unbalanced classifications elsewhere, but these are minor compared to what we have.

How could the editors actually have gotten enough authors to write more or less on time? It borders on the miraculous.

The only work at all comparable is the *Traité de Zoologie*; the *Handbuch der Zoologie* is too incomplete and seems likely to remain so. The *Traité* has some advantages. It has usually fuller treatments, with much more on anatomy; it has many more figures; and it includes extinct forms. (The *Synopsis* has dodos but not moas or elephant birds, extinct a few hundred years earlier.) However, the *Traité* is still not quite complete and some volumes are now thirty years old; it is extremely expensive;

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¹*Synopsis and Classification of Living Organisms* (S.P. Parker, editor in chief,) New York: McGraw-Hill. xviii + 1166 + 1232 pp. + 142 plates. \$149.50.

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at least for mites it doesn't give treatments at the family level, and it doesn't include plants (in the broad sense) or bacteria. As any biologist should read French and German the language shouldn't be a problem, but I suppose it is. The revised Engler's *Syllabus der Pflanzenfamilien* is available for plants, but it too is now thirty years old, and the recent volume edited by Starr et al., *The Prokaryotes*, provides more than most people could want on that group. The *Synopsis* comes out best overall.

I never thought I would call a book priced at \$150 cheap, but this is. It is worth much more than 5 average books at \$30. It is a third the price per page of the usual Academic Press book and has twice as much on a page.

Everyone interested in organisms should have the *Synopsis* available if at all possible. I do not say this lightly. It should be the first book on real organisms bought even by small libraries. I hope some way will be found to make it available in soft-currency countries.