Taxonomische und ökologische Revision der Ciliaten des Saprobiensystems. Band 1: Cyrtophorida, Oligotrichida, Hypotrichida, Colpodea.
By W. Foissner, H. Blatterer, H. Berger and F. Kohman. Published by Bayerisches Landesamt für Wasserwirtschaft (1991). DM75.00, pp. 478. ISSN: 0176-4217.

The use of ciliated protista as indicators of water quality has never been a widespread practice; collection and identification have always been cited high on the list of objections. What Professor Foissner and colleagues have done here is to collect together the scattered literature on the subject and standardized the saprobity measurements used.

The book begins with a chapter on methodology, including sampling, isolation and staining. The main body of the test is organized taxonomically, with pictorial keys laid out as flow charts. The taxonomic sections include synonymy lists and lavish illustration using both light and electron micrographs as well as diagrams – this book would not be out of place on the coffee table.

As with all such works, there is a danger that the more naive reader might think that the list of species covered is exhaustive; it is not, covering only those found in saprobic, freshwater environments, cyrtophrines, oligotrichs, hypotrichs (including the stichotrichs) and the colpodids.

Besides the taxonomic reviews, the feature of greatest importance to those working within this branch of microbial ecology are the environmental tables giving the tolerance ranges for a set of environmental factors including pH, temperature, oxygen and various ionic species in addition to the 'saprobity index' for those species for which data are available; many of these data have been gleaned from the literature while others are reported for the first time.

The book comes as a loose leaf folder printed on good quality paper, and at less than £30 is astonishingly good value for money. As the title suggests, it is written in German: please do not let that put you off. The authors have taken great pains to use straightforward language, have restricted themselves to very simple grammatical constructs and have used a vocabulary of only a couple of hundred words.

Vol. 2 has just appeared covering Peritrichia, Heterotrichiada and Odontostomatida.

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