

ticides in certain families. My final complaint is that the book only covers the literature up to 1992, so that some of the most recently discovered insecticidal molecules cannot be found here.

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Medicinal Natural Products: A Biosynthetic Approach.

PAUL M. DEWICK. Wiley (Chichester), 1997, £80 (cloth), £29.95 (paper).

In a recent survey of the top twenty best-selling drugs (*Account Chem. Research*, 1996, **29**, 112–113) eight were either natural products or were analogues of natural products. This situation thus differs little from the one that existed two hundred years ago when morphine was first extracted in a pure state. At that time, most medicines were either of natural origin (herbal medicines) or were inorganic salts. Certainly the initial reason for the study of natural product chemistry, was the desire to know more about the chemical constituents of opium, cinchona extract, herbs and spices, etc. Once the structures had been established, attempts were made to synthesise the molecules and to explore the modes of biosynthesis. Underpinning all of these endeavours, was a pervading interest in the pharmacology and toxicology of natural products.

Any author of a textbook on natural products has to decide which of these aspects to cover, since coverage of all of them is usually precluded if the book is to have a reasonable size and price. Paul Dewick has written his book primarily for undergraduates of pharmacy courses, though it would be equally suitable for medicinal chemists or pharmacologists. Biosynthetic pathways to all classes of natural products are covered in some detail, with discussion of the mech-

anisms of the chemical reactions involved. Purists might argue that there is very little mention of experiments using isotopic labelling, but this would be to miss the point that this is a book that stresses the biological activity of the natural products, rather than the intimate details of the biosynthetic investigations.

The various sections (enclosed in boxes) that describe these biological properties are numerous, highly informative and very up-to-date. There are, for example, highly topical sections on taxol, the squalestatins, the 'endogenous cannabinoid' anandamide, and the clinically important inhibitors of steroid metabolism like formestane and finasteride. These are complemented by extensive coverage of the more 'mainstream' pharmacologically important products like the ergot alkaloids (6 pages), penicillins and cephalosporins (10 pages), opiates (6 pages), cardiac glycosides (7 pages), peptide antibiotics and toxins (12 pages), etc.

The quality of the production of the book is superb, full stereochemistry is given for all structures, and there are excellent lists of pertinent books and reviews at the end of each chapter. Paul Dewick's enthusiasm for his subject is much in evidence, and this book will be both welcomed and enjoyed by all those who want to know the basic facts about medicinal natural products.

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