REVIEW

P.S. ASHTON & S. APPANAH (rev.), H.S. BARLOW (ed.): **C.F. Symington: Foresters' Manual of Dipterocarps.** Syoan-Hakubutukan, Malaysia, 2004. xxiv + 519 pp., illus. ISBN 983-2883-00-8. Price: USD 75.

Symington's Foresters' Manual of Dipterocarps has been the standard reference on the most important tree family of Peninsular Malaysia since its first publication in 1943 and generations of foresters and biologists used it as a major source of information on taxonomy and related fields. Two main authorities on Dipterocarps have undertaken the task to revise this field guide giving access to 162 different species. The definition of the species in the various genera has been maintained in this revised edition and name changes are few although the authors state that they "anticipate that molecular phylogenetic research may soon provide novel and irrefutable evidence in favour of different generic alignments from the present". The largest changes occur in the introduction section where a chapter on 'Geological History and World Distribution of the Dipterocarps' has been added. There is also a note on current abundance of the family using the IUCN criteria for critically endangered, endangered and vulnerable species. The structure of the descriptions remained as it was although improving the reading by listing the main characters in rows instead of in one major block. Many of the photographs added in the reprint of 1974 have now found their way nearby the description of the various genera, which is more convenient. Luckily, the photographs of herbarium specimens have been omitted which is not a real loss as they either were too dark or too light.

After reading this book I wondered whether we really need this kind of revision which in my eyes is too conservative. I suppose that the review costs quite a lot of time and work for the authors as well as the editor and I think one could have used both with the modern technology at hand much more efficiently. This book looks like a chimera with quite a lot of dull black-and-white drawings and photographs and a modern lay-out and one wonders why it was not possible to add some attractive colour-photos and replace the outdated line-drawings with more professional ones which, I presume, are available at FRIM, MNS or with the authors. I am afraid that the modern, young forestry or biology student as well as nature lovers will not be keen to buy this still expensive book, especially as more modern identification tools like the Manuals of Dipterocarps for Foresters, published by Newman, Burgess & Whitmore for Singapore, the Philippines, Java, Sumatra, and Borneo are available using interactive multi-access keys. The latter may inspire our young generation much more and will possibly make them more enthusiastic for nature conservation issues and plant taxonomy as its base.

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