

OBITUARY

Edred John Henry Corner
12 Jan 1906 - 14 Sep 1996



E.J.H. Corner came out East as a young man in 1929 and served as Assistant Director of the Singapore Botanic Gardens under Professor R.E. Holttum till 1945. His research duties were mainly concerned with the fungi, a great diversity of which are found in the tropics. Through his wanderings in the forests of Singapore and the Malay Peninsula he amassed a great collection of fungi and he also gradually build up an extensive knowledge of trees and palms of the region.

In 1940 Corner published his first book, *Wayside Trees of Malaya*, in two volumes. This work written in his lucid and friendly style is full of detail that reveal a personal familiarity with the subject matter. Now in its third edition, this is still the best book on the common (and many not so common) trees of the area covered. To solve the problem of collecting botanical specimens from tall trees Corner developed an idea inspired by watching monkeys trained to pick coconuts. Acquiring some of these animals, he had them retrained as botanical specimen collectors - the first apes in the civil service.

During the Japanese occupation Corner remained in the Gardens where he was allowed to continue with his research. He left the Gardens in 1946, and after a short interlude with UNESCO in Brazil, took up a teaching position at Cambridge University where he remained until he retired in 1973 as Professor of Tropical Botany. Reputed to be an eloquent and persuasive teacher, he attracted to tropical

botany a steady stream of outstanding students, some of whom remain as leaders in the field.

Corner published in a range of topics. Books include the following: *A Monograph of Clavaria* (1950), *The Life of Plants* (1964), *The Natural History of Palms* (1966), *Seeds of Dicotyledons* (2 volumes, 1976), *The Freshwater Swamp Forests of South Johore and Singapore* (1978), *Ad Polyporaceas* (7 volumes, 1983-1991) and *Botanical Monkeys* (1992).

To the Singapore Botanic Gardens, Corner left behind a legacy of research and scholarship; as part of the rich history and tradition of the Gardens he will continue to inspire new generations of botanists. The colonial bungalow in the Gardens where he lived as Assistant Director has been named E.J.H. Corner House in his honour.

Singapore Botanic Gardens
National Parks Board