

Book review: Fernando E.S., Min Hwan Suh, Jaeho Lee and Don Koo Lee. 2008. **Forest Formations of the Philippines.** ASEAN-Korea Environmental Cooperation Unit (AKECU), Korea, 232 pp. ISBN 978-89-92239-40-0 93530.

This is a beautiful pictorial guidebook produced under the joint research program of ASEAN-Korea Environmental Cooperation project (AKECOP). The book illustrates the various types of forest formations found in the Philippines today with minimal text but heavily elucidated with hundreds of colour images of the forest structures and representative plant species. According to the book, the aim is, "to help increase awareness, understanding, and appreciation of the rich biodiversity of the Philippine forests, and promote their conservation and sustainable use." Indeed, considering that the country today has less than 10% of the original forest cover, the publication is a timely reminder and serves to educate the young generation of Filipinos and people from the region what the country looked like once upon a time with its extensive and diverse forest formations.

The book starts with a short and succinct introduction that includes a terse description of the physical geography, geological origin and vegetation history of the island groups. It shows in a tabulated form the 12 types of natural primary forest vegetation still found in the country and their differences in soil water requirement, location, soil type, and elevation range. The 12 forest types described and illustrated in the book follow the forest classification proposed by Whitmore in 1984 in his book entitled, "Tropical Rain Forests of the Far East" (Oxford Press). They are: (1) Tropical lowland evergreen rain forest, (2) Tropical lower montane rain forest, (3) Tropical upper montane rain forest, (4) Tropical subalpine forest, (5) Forest over limestone, (6) Forest over ultramafic rocks, (7) Beach forest, (8) Mangrove forest, (9) Peat swamp forest, (10) Fresh water swamp forest, (11) Tropical semi-evergreen rain forest, and (12) Tropical moist deciduous forest. The book concludes with a short glossary of technical terms, the Literature Cited, an Acknowledgements and an Index.

Separate illustrative maps showing the limited range and disjunctive location of the limestone forest formation, the ultramafic forest formation, peat swamp forest formation and the fresh water swamp forest formation in the Philippines are provided. It would be more useful and educational had the authors of the book also provided up-to-date distribution maps for all other forest formations today.

No doubt, this pictorial book, with its many colourful photos, has made the reading and understanding of the usually dry subject matter of forest vegetation types easy and enjoyable.

What struck me most are the three chapters reporting on the ultramafic

forest, peat swamp forest and fresh water swamp forest formations in the Philippines. My own knowledge about them in the Philippines has been enriched after reading the book. To my knowledge, this book is the first to document in writing and show with photos the existence of peat swamp forest in the Philippine archipelago! I can see from the photos presented that the peat swamp forest discovered recently in southern Philippines does have a similar plant community structure and harbors the same dominant plant species found in the peat swamp forest in Borneo. As these last mentioned three types of forest formations are also not well known to many in the neighboring countries, the book will be useful for any library in the region to possess.

My main “complaint” about the book is the uneven quality of sharpness of the colored photos printed in the book ranging from good to excellent. A cursory read of the book will reveal some photos that appear dull in color separation and not very clear in image outline, while others are printed in brilliant, colourful texture to show details in good contrast. Some of the well composed and reproduced photos of individual plant species seen in the book that merit a special mention are *Monophyllaea merrilliana* on p. 93, *Xanthostemon fruticosus* on p. 102, *Bruguiera gymnorhiza* on p. 143, *B. sexangula* on p. 144, *Nypa fruticans* on p. 160, *Medinilla teysmanii* on p. 179 and *Symphorema luzonicum* on p. 210. As several of the plant species photographed and shown in the book are the uncommon, rare and endemic plant taxa in Philippines, the book has an added value in providing a pictorial aid to the identification of these little known species.

My other criticism against the book is the very small print of the photo credits of the photographers in the acknowledgement.

I like to recommend this pictorial book to everyone who has an interest in knowing and learning about the different types of forest formation in the region, not just in the Philippines. It is a great pleasure and deep intellectual satisfaction to read this book and appreciate the beauty of the plant world, as well as to imbibe the rich information of the types of forest formation conveyed by the book. In fact, I will recommend the book to every school and university, research institutions and government offices across the country, and in the region too, as an important reference.

The authors are to be congratulated for a pictorial book well prepared to create public awareness on an important topic of conservation today – the tropical rainforest vegetation.

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