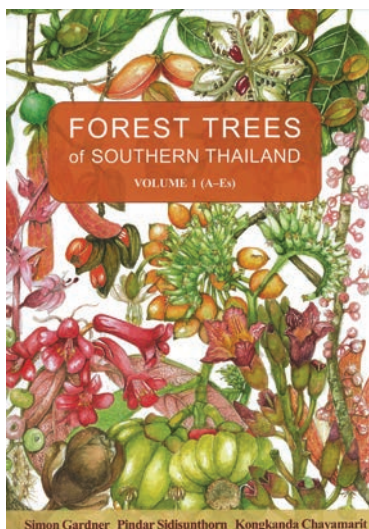


**BOOK REVIEW: Forest Trees of Southern Thailand, Volume 1 (A–Es).** *Simon Gardner, Pindar Sidisunthorn and Kongkanda Chayamarit.* 2015.

Bangkok: Kobfai Publishing Project. 24 × 17 cm, hard cover, 768 pp. ISBN 978-616-7150-39-0 (English edition), ISBN 978-616-7150-43-7 (Thai edition). Price 2200 Baht.



In 2000, the remarkable book *A Field Guide to the Forest Trees of Northern Thailand* was published in both English and Thai. That book contained easy-to-use keys, simple descriptions and numerous paintings and photographs, thereby making identification of the trees of the region, and access to information about them, much simpler. It became a best seller. The same three authors have now turned their hands to a sister project, the trees of southern Thailand, again with English and Thai language editions. The biggest difference is in the sheer scale of the task: southern Thailand has a much greater number of tree species than northern Thailand and no longer will the information fit into a single volume. Indeed three volumes are planned of which the first has just been published, the second is planned for early

2016, and the third for late 2016. The commitment to excellence displayed in the northern Thailand book is again very evident in the first volume of this new work. It is both an excellent source of knowledge and simply a beautiful book to peruse.

The inside front and back covers provide an illustrated glossary of technical botanical terms (e.g. leaf type, leaf arrangement, leaf shape, inflorescence type, fruit type etc.). The opening chapter gives information on how to use the guide, how to go about identifying trees, the classification of trees into orders and families (using APG III), and how to collect parts from trees in order to identify them later. The Introduction is divided into three sections: Geography, Flora and Vegetation. The Geography section includes information on geology, topography and climate; the Flora section tells us there are at least 2250 tree species in southern Thailand, comprising about 75% of Thailand's total, as well as how geographical and historical factors have led to such species richness in the region; and the Vegetation section guides us through the major forest types and their major floristic compositions. Black and white photos and drawings abound to illustrate the text.

The bulk of the book, however, is given over to the systematic presentation of the trees of southern Thailand. The arrangement is alphabetical by family, then alphabetical by genus within each family, and then alphabetical by species within each genus. Keys are provided to the genera within a family and to the species within a genus for the larger genera. For the larger families spot characters are given for the genera to aid identification. Families, genera and species are described, with diagnostic characters highlighted in bold type. But this is no ordinary Flora, as more than half of almost every page of the volume is devoted to colour photographs, line drawings

and paintings of trees. The authors recommend various ways of using the information contained within the volume to identify trees, including just flicking through and looking at the pictures. As a professional botanist myself, used to using weighty academic Floras, I have lost count of the number of times that I have fruitlessly been attempting to identify something and wished I could just look at pictures. This guide to southern Thai trees gives us both licence and opportunity to indulge in such activities!

The first volume includes all plant families from Acanthaceae to Escalloniaceae so includes major families such as Annonaceae, Apocynaceae, Burseraceae, Combretaceae and Ebenaceae. And, of course, it has the Dipterocarpaceae, the characteristic family of Asian tropical forests. Eight genera and over 70 species are covered in the book from this family alone, with photographs and drawings of whole trees, bark, leaves, flowers and fruits for most of them.

Inevitably in a project of such scale not all identifications are correct. For example, Johnson & Murray's paper on *Xylopia* in this issue of *Gardens' Bulletin Singapore* notes that there are two misidentifications in this genus. At the same time, however, the *Xylopia* paper draws our attention to an extremely positive aspect of the wider project that resulted in this book. A vast amount of field work was necessary to collect and photograph the species in this volume and those collections are, and will continue to be, available for taxonomic study. Johnson & Murray's study of the collection accompanying the photos of the incorrectly identified *Xylopia vielana* led to the description of a new species, *Xylopia platycarpa*. Perhaps more such examples will arise, particularly in those families not yet completed for the *Flora of Thailand*. Nevertheless, it is abundantly clear that the authors have striven hard to produce a work of botanical accuracy as well as aesthetic appeal and a small number of misidentifications is an inevitable consequence of such an ambitious project. The authors are to be commended for having that ambition and seeing it to fruition.

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