

**BOOK REVIEW: Tropical Forest Scientist.  
Francis S.P. Ng and FRIM 1964–1991.  
Francis S.P. Ng. 2018.**

Kepong, Kuala Lumpur: Forest Research Institute Malaysia. 25.5 × 19 cm, softcover, 200 pp. ISBN 978-967-2149-07-1 (softcover), price RM30.

As its title indicates, this is both autobiography and anecdotal history of the Forest Research Institute Malaysia, or FRIM as it is better known. It is a fascinating read for anyone interested in botany and forestry, but not just for its stimulating scientific and technical content. The narrative tells the story of the Merdeka generation to whom the book is dedicated – the struggles fought as Malaysia established itself after Independence

from British rule. Francis Ng is a wonderful story-teller, though he is not telling of fictional events. The many characters in his account are all real and it is at times perhaps brave of him that he recounts some moments of tension without fear of rebuke. It is also clear that either he has a remarkable memory or has been very thorough in writing down the day-to-day happenings over so many years. It is hard to know where to pick examples from, as the book has many entertaining moments. The story of Frank White riding a Vespa and the ostrich encounter on a country road in Zambia (page 46) is a classic. Likewise the phenomenon of crown shyness in Kapur (*Dryobalanops aromatica*), pages 85–86. The conservation of species and habitats is a recurring theme, as it should be, and it is pleasing to note that Francis and his FRIM colleagues were prepared to stick their necks out to highlight the wanton destruction of pristine areas for human gain and nature's loss, even resorting to an expensive newspaper advertising campaign (pp. 73–75). The remarkable sapwood of the Jelutong (*Dyera costulata*), one of Southeast Asia's tallest trees, is a revelation (p. 156). I had not imagined that the wood of any large tree could all be alive, as opposed to the more usual division between dead heartwood and living sapwood, but the Jelutong apparently has a trunk that is entirely alive and suffused throughout with a latex that prevents anything from eating or decaying it!

In conclusion we can all learn a lot from Francis Ng's exceptional career, and his contributions to Malaysian botany and forest science are of a significance that has seldom been equalled. It is a delight that we can benefit from his decision to tell his story so frankly and graphically. The book is well illustrated too and FRIM is to be congratulated for the decision to publish it.

**Nigel P. Taylor**

*Singapore Botanic Gardens*

