BOOK REVIEW

by

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Rattans, those spiny climbing palms which are found throughout the forests of the Malay Peninsula, have been used by man for ages for the construction of furniture, binding materials, and many other purposes. Rattans also provide vital ecological niches for many forest animals, e.g. ants and other insects, as well as birds and small mammals. The sweet, juicy fruit is also relished by many forest inhabitants.

These unusual climbers, however, have not been studied by many botanists since they are difficult to collect, bulky, taxonomically complex, and generally incompletely represented in most herbaria. John Dransfield’s revision of the eight genera and 104 species of Malayan rattans is a product of his own extensive field studies combined with a thorough review of relevant literature and the examination of numerous herbarium collections. I was pleased to have met him in the Singapore herbarium several years ago when he was studying our rattan collection, however time did not permit the answering of all the questions I had concerning this group.

The study of Malaysian rattans dates back to the mid-1800’s with accounts by Griffith and Blume. Beccari, Ridley, and most recently the late C. X. Furtado also worked on this complex group. Dransfield’s manual includes chapters on rattan morphology, natural history, utilization, and taxonomy. The taxonomic part, forming the bulk of the book, includes keys to genera and species based mostly on vegetative features, literature citations, complete descriptions with lucid line drawings, distribution, uses, and short comments for each taxon.

This book is a scholarly revision of a very difficult group of plants which is presented in a format and style that naturalists and taxonomists can easily understand. Dransfield has made a significant contribution to the knowledge of the Malayan flora which ranks with other masterpieces on the wayside trees (Corner), orchids and ferns (Holttum), grasses (Gilling), palms (Whitmore), and other groups from the region. This rattan book is a necessary companion to the *Tree Flora of Malaya* volumes and is an invaluable addition to the Malayan Forest Record series.