

Obituary: Prof. Dr Thawatchai Santisuk (1944–2020)



Prof. Dr Thawatchai Santisuk, one of Thailand's most widely respected plant taxonomists, passed away on 3 July 2020 at the age of 76, after a long illness. He was born in Songkhla on 20 March 1944. He graduated with a Bachelor's degree from the Faculty of Forestry at Kasetsart University in 1967, followed by a Master's degree in Plant taxonomy from the University of Edinburgh in 1970 and a PhD in Plant taxonomy from the University of Copenhagen in 1976.

Prof. Thawatchai was a superb botanist and ecologist, as well as a brilliant teacher, actively involved in many aspects of botanical science in Thailand. He spent his whole career with the Forest Herbarium, Royal Forest Department (BKF), which later became the Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation, based in Bangkok. His most important and lasting contribution was as Editor-in-Chief of the Flora of Thailand and Thai Forest Bulletin (Botany). He was deeply committed to the Flora project, with a lasting legacy of bringing the production of the Flora to international standards. He was a very able ambassador for the Flora, representing Thai botany at many international meetings. He actively engaged with the members of the Flora editorial board and was very welcoming to the many Thai and foreign botanists who visited BKF (often over a delicious lunch in a local restaurant).

Prof. Thawatchai was equally at home working on ecological projects. In particular, he published an outstanding article on vegetation types in Thailand (in Thai), which remains the most important ecological

treatise on Thai forest types. He travelled to herbaria around the world, not only to study the Thai collections of many plant families but to bring new advances in botanical research and education back to BKF and other Thai botanical institutes. He was also awarded a Professorship at Kasetsart University.

In later years, Prof. Thawatchai was a fellow of the Academy of Science, The Royal Society of Thailand. He accompanied HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn on a number of local and overseas visits and continued to undertake extensive botanical surveys throughout the country. He edited many manuscripts for various publications, with critical comments that would point out modern ways of classification. His vast knowledge of the Thai flora was passed on to a younger generation of botanists at BKF, Kasetsart and other universities where he taught the botany components of courses in advanced Taxonomy, Palynology and Pharmaceutical Botany. He was also a member of many committees for Master's and Doctoral degrees, a reflection of his excellent supervision skills.

Prof. Thawatchai was honoured by having several taxa named after him. The genus *Santisukia* Brummitt (Bignoniaceae) was named for him to acknowledge his contribution to Bignoniaceae - one of the first families that he contributed to the Flora of Thailand. Four species have also been named after him: *Croton santisukii* Airy Shaw (Euphorbiaceae), *Glochidion santisukii* Airy Shaw (Euphorbiaceae), *Impatiens santisukii* T. Shimizu (Balsaminaceae) and *Terminalia santisukiana* Patthar. & Poopath (Combretaceae). Dick Brummitt, Kenneth Airy Shaw and Tatemi Shimizu were all good friends of Prof. Thawatchai, while Nannapat Pattharahirantricin and Manop Poopath were two of his students who later became colleagues in the Forest Herbarium.

Prof. Thawatchai is survived by his wife Paiparn, his son Chakorn and his twin grandchildren. His kind, gentle and polite personality will be very much missed but he will forever remain in our memories.

Kongkanda Chayamarit & David A. Simpson

On behalf of the
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