

Book Review

Beach Forest Species and Mangrove Associates in the Philippines. By Jurgenne H. Primavera and Resurreccion B. Sadaba. SEAFDEC Aquaculture Department, Tigbauan, Iloilo, 2012. ISBN 978-971-9931-01-0, paperback, 28 cm., vii+154 pages. US\$50.00 Order inquiries should be directed to the first author using this address: jurgennep@yahoo.com

Filipinos have had an ongoing romance with the coastlines of their islands. The lush beach forests dotting these coasts contain unique vegetation that adjust equally well to the challenges of the salty soil and warm tropical winds. For centuries, beach forests have provided shelter from the strong typhoon winds. The coastal plains of the Philippines were among the first sites opened for human settlement and sprouting towns and cities have displaced beach forests and mangrove swamps. This love-hate relationship between man and nature is evidenced by the many towns named after beach forest elements such as talisay, pandan, balibago and so on.

Beach Forest Species and Mangrove Associates in the Philippines is the latest contribution of the tandem of Jurgenne Primavera and Rex Sadaba who eight years earlier published the highly acclaimed Handbook of the Mangroves of the Philippines - Panay. This latest work follows in the fine tradition of scholarship, relevance, utility and readability set by the authors in their previous work. It is easy-to-read scientific exposition, economic botany, environmental education and national pride rolled into one handy, colorful volume. The topic on beach forests and mangroves has gained more relevance these days in the wake of the catastrophic 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami when beach forest and mangrove greenbelts were reported to act as life-

saving buffer zones. The growing intensity and frequency of weather disturbances brought by changing global climate highlight the important role of beach forests as bio-shield for vulnerable coastal communities. Sad to say, beach forests continue to disappear due mainly to conversion into human settlements and wanton harvesting for fuel wood and medicinal plant parts.

The book is a collection of 140 species both familiar and poorly known, with ~100 treated exhaustively including scientific names, English names, local/regional names, botanical descriptions and folk uses. The plethora of information is supplemented by superb nature photography uncommon in recent Philippine publications. Many of the species are illustrated for the first time in this book. Another strength of this book is the well researched section on ethnobotany culled from original and classical literature during the authors' library visits in five countries. A few species of established economic importance, e.g., the coconut and sago palm, are treated more extensively by showing their multifaceted uses and the historical background of such uses. Reading through this armchair travelogue of beach forests is both a visual feast and quenching experience for information. Some species described are veritable one-species drugstores owing to their many pharmaceutical applications. The seeds of

the Chinese lantern tree reportedly contain useful as hair tonic and for making candles, with potential for biofuel production. The fibers from the sea hibiscus made into the popular Hawaiian hula grass skirts are hailed as 'fiber par excellence' The abrasive leaves of the vine commonly known as hagupit in Panay are find use as sandpaper, while the colorful seeds of the wild liquorice have been implicated in murder cases in India. A 600 year old bitaug or dangcalan which probably witnessed the landing of Magellan on Agusan shores was declared the Centennial Tree during the 1998 centennial anniversary of Philippine Independence.

The book sends an urgent message about the vulnerable state of the country's beach forests, their largely untapped ecological and economic potentials and their natural heritage value for posterity. The message rings loud and clear that indigenous species should be actively promoted for reforestation purposes instead of fast-growing alien species which often alter ecological balance. In addition, this book gets readers to know more about these poorly understood beach forests, to spend time to commune with these endangered species even if only through the colorful pages of this volume in the comfortable confines of one's home. This book should be found in the libraries of every village school and home. It is a wise investment towards instilling scientific literacy, environmental awareness and love of Philippine natural heritage among all citizens. The authors deserve to be warmly congratulated and encouraged to continue their worthy efforts.

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