

I. EDITORIAL

The symbol of the Flora Malesiana is the *Rafflesia*, a picture of which adorns the front cover of this Bulletin. It is therefore with mixed feelings that we have heard the news that a new species was discovered in Sabah, but its type locality was nearly immediately destroyed by logging activities (Salleh & Latiff, 1989, and Chapter IX). Fortunately another one seems to have been discovered. This is but one example of many of the irreplaceable losses Nature suffers through the thoughtless activities of Man. The instigators of this instance are known, but will remain free to continue to make a buck. It is a strange world where fines are meted out to smugglers of protected species. One of these defended himself by saying that he had played such a positive role in nature conservation. Of course the judge disagreed, but considering the on-going loss of natural habitats by exploitation and pollution, the defendant did make a point to ponder. What is better: a species irrevocably gone, or one in a zoo or a botanical garden?

In the history of the earth a score of periods of extinctions have taken place, the cause of which is a matter of speculation: comet impacts, the passing through galactic dust clouds, a mysterious sister-star, extensive ice ages that drained the seas? Most spectacular were the ones of the middle Perm (c. 250 My) and on the Cretaceous–Tertiary border (c. 65 My), where 90% and 75% of all species respectively disappeared.

Again mankind intends to place himself above nature, and another period of extinction is in progress which may pale the previous ones. Extinction then is supposed to have taken at least thousands of years or more to halve the number of species. Man can do better than that and in the next 50 years may reduce the number of species by 33%. More, if the predicted greenhouse effect sort the results envisaged by some. Gaia will hit back then, for the resulting rising of the sea will force perhaps 300 million people to move, and the disasters of Bangladesh will be on a worldwide scale. That country is in deep economic trouble now, what will the rest of the world experience by the middle of the next century? Is it like a Greek drama: you see it happen and seem to be powerless to stop the direction of the act! The WWF, IUCN, Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, the Malayan Nature Society, and hundreds of other NGOs seem to think otherwise, and through continuous local and international pressure try to stem the tide. More power to them! Become a member!

The views expressed in the Flora Malesiana Bulletin do not necessarily reflect those of the Rijksherbarium, Leiden.