

FROM THE EDITORS

Flora Malesiana Bulletin 50 years young

This issue is a special number, not because it is the latest of the Bulletin – for we try to make every issue a special one – but in June it was 50 years ago that the first one appeared. This, called ‘Bulletin Flora Malesiana’, was distributed with 150 copies only, of which 112 were sent to cooperating institutes, libraries, botanists, and interested persons. We now (1997) have an impression of 650, a stock which occasionally was very soon depleted.

Until 1974 the Flora Malesiana Bulletin was under the editorship of the inexhaustible Professor Van Steenis, for a brief period assisted by Dr. H.C.D. de Wit (1950–1951). Then Dr. M. Jacobs took over, and he put a very special imprint on the Bulletin because of his great biographic and nature conservation interests. After his sudden death (1982), Dr. C. Kalkman for one year added the editorship to his burdens, and in 1984 passed the flag on to me. In 1992 it was decided to make the editorship more international and Dr. Mien Rifai of Bogor became co-editor.

I think we all may be allowed to be a bit proud of the achievement. A periodical is not written by the editors (although at times it may seem so), but can only flourish through the direct or indirect contributions of many. As a result, I do not think there is any tropical region with a dedicated Bulletin that has lasted so long, and hopefully will last much longer. As W.J. Hooker has said, “a fine collection is the result of many unsuccessful excursions,” and so the continuing stream of issues with minor and major items has built up an unparalleled reference work for the area and adjacent regions.

The indices were formerly meticulously prepared by hand by Ms. M.J. van Steenis-Kruseman, and are now automatically generated by the computer and therefore much more restricted in subjects. I can hear the complaint that a complete series of the Flora Malesiana Bulletin is present in only a few places in Malesia or elsewhere. We try to remedy that: Dr. P.H. Hovenkamp (L) is gradually putting the bibliographies of the last issues (and this one) on the WWWeb so that you can more easily consult *and* browse:

<http://rulrhh.leidenuniv.nl/www/pubs/fmbull/biblio.html>

We have also taken the first steps in the preparation of CD-ROM treatments of Flora Malesiana families: in cooperation with ETI (Amsterdam) Dr. J.W.A. Ridder-Numan and Dr. I. de Kort (L) hope to have finished the *Leguminosae* in 2.5 years time; Mr. A. Schuiteman (L) will put the Malesian *Orchidaceae* on disk, while Dr. E.M. Bakker (U) will treat the *Annonaceae* on a world-wide basis.

Mr. L.P.M. Willemsse (L) is supervising a project to register type specimens in a database present in the three major herbaria of the Netherlands: L, U, and WAG. The estimated 60,000 sheets will be scanned in for a future use which can at present not be envisioned: perhaps as CD-ROMs or on the Net. The project is funded by NWO, the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research.

In Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, our colleagues are exerting themselves in the preparation of the *Fourth Flora Malesiana Symposium* (19–25 July 1998), preceded by the *Stone Memorial Symposium* dedicated to the memory of Dr. B.C. Stone (see announcement on page 31). Hope to see you all there! — J.F. Veldkamp

The next five years

In 1993, at the International Botanical Congress in Yokohama, the Flora Malesiana was called 'a revitalized Flora Project' and Dr. R. Schmid (Taxon 46, 1997, 179–194) regarded it 'among the very best Floras.' We are of course modestly proud of these positive verdicts. We now see an accelerated production of instalments and a number of (international) programmes and projects have recently been funded. Now it comes to the point of keeping this momentum. The next two volumes are either in press or in the final editorial stage. However, as yet there is hardly any concrete sign of other bulky families (e.g., those promised for last year, this year, or the next couple of years) to be handed over to the editors. Moreover, the progress realized in the '90s is less than envisaged from the results of the first questionnaire in 1992. Already for the planning period of four years only 3/4th of the contributions promised to be ready before 1996 have been realized. With the present steady progress with one instalment per year in the '90s, it will take at least 15 years to reach a coverage of 50% of the species (now 20%). This shows what an enormous task we still have to face when aiming at completion of Flora Malesiana.

First of all, manifestly, we need more people to work on family treatments. The next five years will be crucial to future progress. We have to establish new working teams and strengthen existing teams on the remaining large families to bring a timely completion in sight. Teams are the only way to proceed and successfully attack such families. To be able to recruit new authors, fund raising should include funds for training programmes to raise new generations of taxonomists.

Special attention is needed to increase the number of authors from the region itself. It is a very unfavourable situation that the majority of authors of Flora Malesiana revisions published so far are European. In Malaysia a team of well-trained botanists will become available when the Tree Flora of Sabah and Sarawak is completed. But how will they be employed, and will they be allowed to join?

Secondly, all present collaborators are urged to write down what they know. It already will mean a great step forwards towards a reliable, complete FM, when they restrict themselves more to a critical compilation of the, already quite substantial, existing knowledge. This can be done without doing too much violence to our scientific integrity, as taxonomic complexities can be circumscribed for future research.

Thirdly, we have to work hard on increased computerization of the data. This will enable cheaper and much faster accessibility and exchange of information. Keeping a sharp focus on what we are aiming at, i.e., producing a reliable Flora at high speed, we need to exploit the possibilities of the modern multimedia format for presenting our comprehensive biodiversity information in a readily accessible and a user-friendly format, including multi-entry keys. The production of checklists, collection databases, information systems and identification tools of various taxa on CD-ROM and/or as files accessible via Internet as envisaged in the next five years, will only mean a start to increase the applicability of FM, but may have significant spin-off on the success of fund-raising activities.

Finally, more intensive collaboration and co-ordination with local and adjacent flora projects will be most beneficial. Division of labour, efficiency, mutual stimulation, combining databases, to mention a few of the advantages. We have to join forces as, after

binning databases, to mention a few of the advantages. We have to join forces as, after all, we depend on the same limited financial and human resources. In co-operation with the participants in the FM network, the Board will enhance its attempts to explore the possibilities for additional funding. After all, money is the key issue.

We are pleased to announce that Dr. Alistair Hay and Prof. David Mabberley (Sydney and Leiden) have indicated their willingness to actively search corporate funding for the Flora Malesiana project.

In conclusion, the next five years will be crucial to develop new fund-raising strategies. It is most urgent to promote and raise funds for the establishment and strengthening of working teams to secure future progress. — M.A. Rifai & M.C. Roos