

XII. THE NUMBERING OF SARAWAK FOREST DEPARTMENT COLLECTIONS

Taxonomists working with material collected by the Sarawak Forest Department have often been hard put to decide how to quote numbers. Is the departmental series number preceeded by a letter S, or an F, or would it be best to quote only the collector and the number? I have tried to unravel the history of the Sarawak Forest Department herbarium number series in order to provide a guide to unequivocal citation. This has not been easy, as all collecting books previous to 1951 have disappeared, apparently during the second world war; many of the herbarium collections are now missing at Kuching and Kepong, where most were distributed, for the same reasons, though there seem also to have been large gaps in the series where numbers were never used.

What has eventually been brought to light has been a masterpiece of confusion only vied with in complexity by its Sarawakian forbear, the remarkable numbering, or rather lettering, system of Haviland (explained in Kew Bull. 1907, 197-198).

It appears that no fewer than 5 series were started from time to time within the Sarawak Forest Department. The master mind behind 4 of these was a single person, Mr. D. Carroll, who in fact made the first collection in 2 of these series and the second in a fourth. This alone demonstrates that merely to cite the collector's name and then a number is inadequate; other collectors, Egon and Omar for instance, also collected twice under the same number in different series.

As if to ensnare the investigator still further a register book was kept in Kuching of all collections retained in the Sarawak Forest Department herbarium (a pair of cupboards until 1958). All Kuching duplicates were therefore provided with 2 numbers. They are also supplied with two labels; one detached from the collecting book and also a herbarium label. The register book number however is written in on the herbarium label after the title 'Flora of Sarawak', and the series number from the collecting book, the number in fact under which the specimen was distributed, is usually added in red ink, as if as an afterthought, usually in the top right hand corner, and sometimes with the wrong series prefix.

The register book numbers do, in fact, provide an unequivocal way of citing the Sarawak duplicates, as they were never repeated. They suffer, however, the drawback that they were not written on distributed duplicates; furthermore they do not necessarily continue in strict numerical order relative to the departmental series numbers, though this is the general rule.

The key to unambiguous citation of Sarawak Forest Department numbers is to cite the date of collection, as all collections seem to have been dated and no one number was used twice in one year.

A chronological history of the various series is as follows:

1921 -- The Sarawak Forest Department was founded this year, with J.P.Mead, seconded from Malaya, as its first collector.

1922 -- Collections were made this year by D.Carroll; these constitute the first series (plate 1). They were inscribed with 2 numbers, on a Kepong (Malayan Forest Department) herbarium label over-typed 'Sarawak'. One number series bears no prefix, and is in a series running from 1-23; the other numbers, with the prefix 'FL', runs from 7151-7173 in exactly the same order as the first. Records at Kepong confirm that these latter numbers form part of the C.F. (Kep.) series of the Malayan Forest Department. The former numbers represent the numbers in the registration book. It would be best to quote this series only under the C.F. number, which is unambiguous. This is the only series in which the registration book, not field book, number was written in red ink.

After the Kepong number series was discarded and before a new series was begun, specimens were collected and numbered with the registration book number alone, from 24-46 in 1922 and 1923, and 46-65 in 1924. These sheets can be distinguished as they bear a 'Flora of Sarawak' label, but lack a number in red ink (plate 2); it is necessary to cite the collector and year of collection, and not to add any letter preceding those numbers.

1924 -- In this year the first truly endemic series began, again apparently under Carroll's auspices. This series lacked a prefix but was often cited (but inconsistently) on herbarium labels as the 'F' series (plate 3). Six books of 50 numbers, running from 1-600, were printed in 1922, but were not used until 1924. The numbers 1-49 were at first avoided, and the series starts chronologically with 348 collected by Omar on 4th January 1924. After completion of the series of 400 however, the sequence returns to 50 and continues to 149 before Carroll in February and March 1925 returned to the unused first 50 numbers, later the same year continuing again at 201. This series reached eventually to 599, which number was obtained on April Fool's Day, 1927, in celebration of which, apparently, a new series was begun; it is best, when citing this series, to precede the number with an 'F' as well as citing the date; long after the new 'FA' series was started in 1927 unused numbers in the 'F' series continued to be used, F.277 being collected as late as August 1935.

It should be also noted that in 1925 specimens were collected bearing the register book series (from 266-286), but lacking any other series number. These can be distinguished by their 'Flora of Sarawak' labels in the same way as their 1922-1923 predecessors.

1927 -- The new series, of which apparently 27 books were issued, in a series running to 1350, were printed initially in 1925, but not used until 2 years later. These field labels, usually a blushing pink, have printed before the stamped numbers 'No A.' (plate 4), and consequently the series is often cited on the herbarium labels as FA. This, the third, series had reached 1105 by May 1941, was taken up again in 1951, stopping apparently at number 1321, collected on 2nd April 1952, though the previous day had again apparently unnerved the perpetrator of the series. One book apparently in this series, containing numbers 351-400, was printed slightly differently and without the prefix A (plate 5). The numbers in this book were collected by Carroll and F.G.Browne after the growing apex of the series had expired, in the middle of 1951; they can thus be distinguished from the same number range in the earlier (second) series, which were collected in 1924 and 1925.

1952 -- In this year Dr. J.A.R.Anderson started his studies on the flora of the swamp forests of Sarawak based on the Sibul Forest Office. For this he in 1951 had a special label printed, subcaptioned, 'Fresh Water Swamp forest', and later another, headed 'Forest Department, Sibul' (plate 6), with an unprefixed number series stamped on it. He started his own numbering series, prefixing the numbers on some specimens by hand with an 'S', but this series appears to be independent of the unprefixed numbers stamped on the Sibul labels, as these labels are provided with a further number in ink representing Anderson's series. Anderson's series should be cited with the prefix Si, with the date of collection, but the stamped number on the label should be discarded.

Carroll made his final contribution by having printed in 1952 the first books of the series that alone is used to the present, also prefixed, but in this case in print, with the letter 'S' (plate 7). S.1 in Carroll's series was collected on 2nd December 1952. Though Anderson's Sibul 'S' series was not discontinued until 1954, by which time it had reached to 209, most of the numbers above 100 were renumbered in the true 'S' series, and Anderson's original series was in many cases modified to SA or Si. Luckily Anderson only collected 5 numbers in the true Kuching S. series between 1-209; these are S.24-28 inclusive, and appear not to have been used in the Sibul series, with the exception of 26, which represents Vatica mangachapoi (dated 14.3.53) in the S. series and Shorea uliginosa (dated 8.9.51) in the Sibul series.

The registration book was kept until 1955, when the final number 2188 was placed on the sheet bearing the 'S' number 1472.

Finally, there exists one further source of confusion. Since the establishment of a natural arboretum in Semengoh

F. R., and the numbering of the larger trees contained in it, many collections have been made from this locality and labeled only with the arboretum tree number, not an 'S' series number; these are prefixed 'tree no.' or 'Arb. tree no.' They do not exceed 3500, and have all been collected between 1960-1963.

As the presently used series is called the S. series no others should be preceded by this letter alone; as none of the preceding series exceeded the number 1350, numbers above this need not be quoted with a date.

Mr. Donald Carroll deserves a biographical note in Flora Malesiana, for in all he collected several hundred numbers. Born in Malaya in 1897, he was attached to the Sarawak Forest Department from its start in 1921, as Forest Ranger, special grade, in charge of the administration of Kuching, Lundu and Sadong forest districts. By the time he had retired in 1954 he had won a M.B.E. and been promoted to the senior staff; he died the following year. Throughout the 35 years of his career he was basically a forestry administrator, but as he was usually based on Kuching headquarters, and was known for his interest in botany, he was always put in charge of collecting whenever this activity was encouraged. It was probably the spasmodic nature of the interest in botany shown by the Sarawak Forestry administration that led to the periodic evanescence of successive number series.

Kuching, Sarawak,
now Aberdeen, Scotland.

P.S. Ashton.

Postscript. To this paper, the author added several photocopied samples of the various labels that have in Sarawak been in use. As these cannot be reproduced in the Flora Malesiana Bulletin, they have, with Dr. Ashton's consent, been deposited in the Rijksherbarium file of handwritings. -- Ed.