



## In memoriam Willem Jan Jacobus Oswald de Wilde (1936 – 2021)

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**Fig. 1** Teaching *Cucurbitaceae* to students in Khon Kaen University (NE Thailand), 2011. Photo: Phongsak Phonsena.

In 2016 we celebrated the 80th birthday of Willem and his wife Brigitta, not knowing that only five years later Willem would pass away, after being diagnosed with lung cancer. In this obituary we will make extensive use of the biographical data assembled for the congratulatory paper written on that occasion (Baas et al., *Blumea* 61, 2016: 85, 86).

Willem de Wilde was born 16 September 1936 in Heemskerk (Province of North-Holland, the Netherlands). He studied biology at Leiden University, where he passed his Bachelor and Master of Science degrees *cum laude*. During this study in Leiden he met his wife, Brigitta Duyfjes. After their studies they were both teaching assistants at the Rijksherbarium (later National Herbarium of the Netherlands, now part of Naturalis Biodiversity Center), Leiden, The Netherlands. Willem got a

position with the Dutch Overseas Development Agency in tropical Africa, and was stationed in Cameroon, Ethiopia and Ivory Coast. During these postings he and Brigitta were engaged in botanical collecting, teaching and curation of various herbaria.

In 1966 Willem was appointed on the scientific staff of the Rijksherbarium by Prof. C.G.G.J. van Steenis, who engaged him in his *Flora Malesiana* work to revise the genus *Adenia* (*Passifloraceae*), which also served for his PhD in 1971. Willem, in part together with his wife, revised six families for *Flora Malesiana* (*Cornaceae*, *Cucurbitaceae* (Fig. 1), *Lythraceae*, *Myristicaceae*, *Najadaceae*, *Passifloraceae*), some of which were notoriously difficult. The same families (or sometimes also others, like the *Campanulaceae*, *Polygalaceae*, part of the *Rubiaceae*) were also treated for the regional floras within Malesia or in adjacent areas (*Flore du Cambodge*, *du Laos*, *et du Viêt Nam*, *Flora of Thailand*, *Flora of the Malay Peninsula*, *Flora of Singapore*, *Tree Flora of Sabah and Sarawak*).

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Fig. 2 Collecting in Thailand, on top of Mt. Phu Kradueng (Loei Province), 2011. Photo: Phanom Sutthisaksopon.

Willem was among the best taxonomists in the world, but he was too modest to acknowledge that himself. He always seemed in doubt about his species delimitations, and taxonomic decisions often took a long time, which should sound familiar to all experienced taxonomists. Willem used a morphological approach, which he always gave precedence over molecular and phylogenetic hypotheses. Willem was very productive as he always worked very hard, also after retirement, even up to a few weeks before his death. He did not allow himself many social distractions, and continued working while Brigitta maintained social contacts by visiting people. Jointly, Willem and Brigitta published more than 600 newly described taxa or new name combinations.

Mostly together with Brigitta, he collected or helped to collect about 25 000 herbarium specimens, usually with plenty of duplicates; 161 are types of new names and the teller is still counting. Already during his study Willem organised with several other students an adventurous collecting trip to Turkey, whereby their van was transported by boat instead of driving it themselves to Turkey. The most important expeditions were to the Gunung Leuser Biosphere Reserve where Willem and Brigitta collected five times (in 1972, 1974, 1979, 1985 and 1991) and on which they wrote several review papers that stressed the need for conservation. In addition they collected all over Southeast Asia: Thailand (Fig. 2), Cambodia, Borneo, Java, etc. where they were always welcomed and made lasting friends. Willem and Brigitta returned the favours in the Netherlands as they invited visiting Asian colleagues and students and treated them to excursions (Fig. 3), rowing trips, sight-seeing tours and home-cooked dinners in their lovely house in Woubbrugge.

Willem was an avid ornithologist, and together with family (brothers, wives, etc.) he made annual bird-watching excursions to northern Spain during the bird migration and every year the

family visited Festieux (when it still had a hotel) in the north of France and its beautiful wild flora.

Not only conserved plants were very important to Willem, also the living ones in his house and in his gardens. The De Wilde home is beautifully situated next to a lake and can only be reached by foot or bicycle (or if you know the way by car via the neighbouring farmer). The house is surrounded by a large piece of land with a flower garden (and old hay stack) and a vegetable garden with a small green house. Further away, Willem had another vegetable garden. These vegetable gardens were Willem's major hobby. Every year he would dig his gardens and grow a large variety of vegetables and fruits. The yield was always too big for his small family, but it was shared with many people. The plums and black currants were very suitable for making jam and many other veggies/fruits could be preserved in one way or another for the rest of the year. Of course, maintaining the gardens became more difficult with the years, but Willem continued to work them to the end.

The gardens were in fact one of the ways in which Willem limited his ecological footprint, just like using old frying oil to drive the car, burning the rest wood from the garden in their fireplace. Willem cared much about the environment, but was very pessimistic about the future of the planet: too many people, natural areas disappearing fast, pollution of every environment. He usually sounded like he foresaw the doom of mankind and the planet. Often he would start a discussion, sometimes after listening to others, but always in such a way that it left the others ashamed with the feeling that they were responsible for the mayhem and should do something to improve the situation. He felt the same about the future of taxonomy and the Flora Malesiana Project in Naturalis, and foresaw the extinction of both.

Together with Brigitta, Willem was part of a dream team, partly complementary as well as acting in unison, both modest and



Fig. 3 Trip with PhD students to Kinderdijk (near Rotterdam) in the Netherlands, c. 2011. Photo: Marc Appelhans.

extremely likeable. Those who knew him appreciated his fine sense of humour and witty and pointed remarks.

Willem and Brigitta have one son, Hein. He arranged and maintained their last cars, and made arrangements during the final phase of Willem's life and, in spite of Covid, organised an impressive funeral service. Now he often takes care of Brigitta and we wish both, and Hein's wife Anneke, all the strength needed to overcome the loss of Willem, who will also be dearly missed by all herbarium staff. We are delighted that Brigitta continues her taxonomic work on *Canthium* (*Rubiaceae*) at Naturalis.

### Eponymy of Willem de Wilde

<i>Anacardiaceae</i>	<i>Mangifera dewildei</i> Kosterm.
<i>Annonaceae</i>	<i>Goniothalamus dewildei</i> R.M.K.Saunders
<i>Asteraceae</i>	<i>Senecio dewildeorum</i> Tjittr.
<i>Begoniaceae</i>	<i>Begonia willemii</i> Ardi, Girm. & D.C.Thomas
<i>Cyperaceae</i>	<i>Cyperus dewildeorum</i> (J.Raynal) Lye <i>Pycneus dewildeorum</i> J.Raynal
<i>Elaeocarpaceae</i>	<i>Elaeocarpus dewildei</i> Weibel
<i>Euphorbiaceae</i>	<i>Trigonostemon wildeorum</i> R.Y.Yu & Welzen
<i>Fabaceae</i>	<i>Baphia dewildeana</i> Soladoye
<i>Gesneriaceae</i>	<i>Agalmyla wildeorum</i> Hilliard & B.L.Burt <i>Didissandra wildeana</i> A.Weber & B.L.Burt <i>Monophyllaea wildeana</i> B.L.Burt
<i>Orchidaceae</i>	<i>Anoectochilus dewildeorum</i> Ormerod <i>Bulbophyllum dewildei</i> J.J.Verm. <i>Crepidium dewildeanum</i> Szlach. & Marg. <i>Dendrochilum dewildeorum</i> J.J.Wood & J.B.Comber
<i>Pandanaceae</i>	<i>Freycinetia dewildeorum</i> Pasaribu
<i>Phyllanthaceae</i>	<i>Phyllanthus dewildeanus</i> Jean F.Brunel <i>Phyllanthus dewildeorum</i> M.G.Gilbert
<i>Primulaceae</i>	<i>Ardisia dewildei</i> C.M.Hu
<i>Putranjivaceae</i>	<i>Drypetes dewildei</i> Airy Shaw

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