

R E V I E W S

An Account of the Vegetation of Northern Thailand, by Thawatchai Santisuk. Geocological Research Vol. 5, ed. U. Schweinfurth. Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden GMBH, Stuttgart, 1988. 101 pp. and 75 figs. No price given.

Northern Thailand is in an area of exceptional interest to the biologist, being at the very southern margin of temperate East Asia, and towards the northern margin of the true tropics. In these southward trending tail-ribbons of the eastern Himalaya, which descend from Yunnan and the so-called golden triangle, there still remain Dry Dipterocarp and Moist Deciduous forests at the heads of the plains, a distinct northern facies of the Seasonal Evergreen Indochinese Dipterocarp forests, vast oak-laurel submontane forest, pine savannas and even, on the lofty crests of Doi Chiang Dao, subtropical mountain grasslands resplendent with temperate wildflowers. This vegetational diversity exists in a tight mosaic mediated by the dramatic influence that topography has here on local climate.

Thanks largely to the systematic exploration of the region by the Botany Division of the Royal Thai Forest Department, currently under Dr. Thawatchai's leadership, the botany of northern Thailand region but the very accessibility and peacefulness of northern Thailand is leading to rapid conversion of the aboriginal vegetation, and threatened extinction of its extraordinary flora.

Dr. Thawatchai's monograph has therefore come at an auspicious moment. By providing a careful review of current knowledge, it will act as a firm foundation—and stimulus—to further research while the opportunity lasts; and, we must all hope, for planning an urgently needed blueprint for conservation of representative ecosystems.

The author provides us with a clear and succinct outline of regional geography, followed by a valuable summary of the influence of man on the vegetation, particularly through the agencies of fire and cultivation. There then follows the meat of the book, in two parts. The first addresses the floristic ecology. Following a review of the various existing classifications of regional vegetation, nine principal vegetation types are recognized and described. The abundant photographs provide a useful impression of these types, and of the imprint of man on the landscape. The second, essentially presented as an appendix, is a list of the species of seed plants. This is not supported by herbarium reference numbers, and it is unclear how comprehensive it is, but it nevertheless provides an excellent base for taking stock. In summary, this book is the best review of its kind. If it stimulates an increase in action towards conservation of the biota of northern Thailand, and intensification of research there, then it will have served its purpose.

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