

A Field Guide to the Rattans of Lao PDR, by T. D. Evans, K. Sengdala, O. V. Viengkham, and B. Thammavong. 2001. Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, U.K.; 96 pp. ISBN 1 84246 009 9. Available from: Publications Department; Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, Richmond, Surrey, U.K. £ 17.50.

Rattans, or canes, are a taxonomically complex group of spiny, mostly climbing palms (Palmae or Areceaceae, Calamoideae) which have scaly fruits. All 51 known rattan species, in 6 genera, found in Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Xishuangbana Prefecture in Yunnan, and most of Thailand north of Bangkok, are included in this book. Thirty-two species are known from Laos. The book, therefore, provides a well-needed supplement to the initial work on rattans by GAGNEPAIN & CONRARD (1937) for this region.

The introductory pages include basic notes on the purpose, scope and limitations, distribution, habitat, flowering and fruiting, uses, as well as six pages of essential keys based on vegetative features. There are seven keys, the first one being a general key which indicates groupings for the other keys which cover erect species, climbers with only a flagellum, leaflets grouped or irregular, climbers with a cirrus, knee absent, etc. Each key is based on a vertical series of choices which are further refined in subsequent columns to the right. Although not strictly dichotomous and lacking numbers, the keys have balanced leads and are easy to follow. Only Lao species are included.

The actual taxonomic section includes 31 main species, each with two pages of information, and 20 allied species which have short notes and are associated with specific Lao species. For example, *Plectocomia kerrana*, a rare species from northern Thailand, is included under *P. pierreana* with succinct notes as to their differences. For each of these alphabetically arranged main species there is the botanical name, Lao vernacular names, basic vegetative features (e.g. climbing, clustered, flagellum, knee, etc.), other features to use to recognize the species, habitat, flowering and fruiting months, uses, cultivation, a very useful and vivid color distribution map, color photo of a diagnostic part of the plant, and drawings of leaf, inflorescence, and fruit. Pages 81–86 include drawings of stem habits (stemless, erect, clustered, etc.), leaf sheaths (ocreae and knees), leaf types with details on the arrangements of the leaflets, cirri and flagella, notes on making proper herbarium specimens, conservation, plantations and cultivation techniques, checklist, and a recommended reading list. The inside of the front cover has a field form for rattan notes and the inside of the back cover has indices to subjects (bracts, flagellum, ruminant, etc.) and species.

Although disguising itself as a popular account of rattans by its ‘popular’ and not scientific style, this book is precisely what I need to identify rattans since the only other reference for Indochina (including northern Thailand) noted above is not only out of date, but very complex. I have a few suggestions which could be used to improve further editions of this book or books done with similar expertise and professionalism about other plants (e.g. Fagaceae, fan palms, cane grasses, etc.) which are lacking and would be useful to have. Pages 81–86 should be moved to the introductory section before the keys. This would facilitate a proper understanding of the terminology used in the keys and descriptions. The checklist on p. 93 could have been deleted if author citations and synonyms were included for each species in the main part. Citing the original publication for each species and where the species can be found in Gagnepain & Conrard would certainly enhance the botanical utility of the book. *Calamus kerrianus*, which is frequently found in northern

Thailand, is listed in the checklist on p. 93 as a synonym of species 22, *C. palustris*—a very cumbersome way to present vital information. Furthermore, *C. kerrianus* and all the other synonyms are not listed on the inside of the back cover. A general glossary for all botanical terms used in the book is recommended.

This book is a wonderful contribution to the knowledge of Indochinese rattans. I look forward to using this book both in the field and herbarium, thus avoiding the use of Gagnepain & Conrard or sending specimens to Kew for identification. Compared to many other plant books which have been written on a popular level, *Rattans of Laos PDR* is of superior quality, includes impeccable botanical information, and is highly recommended as a *vade mecum* for rattan aficionados, botanists, and students.

The information presented in this book has been elaborated by EVANS *ET AL.* (2002).

REFERENCES

- EVANS, T. D.; K. SENGDALA, B. THAMMAVONG, O.V. VIENKHAM, AND J. DRANSFIELD. 2002. *A Synopsis of the Rattans (Arecaceae, Calamoideae) of Laos and Neighbouring Parts of Indochina*. Kew Bulletin 57, 1–84.
- GAGNEPAIN, F. AND L. CONRARD. 1937. *Palmiers in Flore Générale de L'Indo-Chine* 6:8, 999–1056.

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