

Thawatchai Santisuk, 1944–2020

Prof. Dr. Thawatchai Santisuk (known as Dr. Thawatchai in Thailand) was born in Songkhla Province in southern Thailand on 20 March 1944. He received his primary and secondary education at Triem Udom Sueksa School (Sampran), Nakhon Prathom, and university education at the Faculty of Forestry, Kasetsart University, Bangkok, graduating in 1967.

He became engaged with the Forest Herbarium (BKF), Royal Forest Department (at present, Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation), Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, in the following year. He soon received a grant to pursue graduate studies in plant taxonomy at the University of Edinburgh, finishing in 1970. In 1973, he received a grant to pursue a doctorate degree in plant taxonomy at the University of Copenhagen, Denmark, from the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA), which he completed in 1976. His research was aimed at supporting the study of Thai plants under the “Flora of Thailand” project.

Dr. Santisuk returned to the Forest Herbarium and continued working on the taxonomy of Thai plants. This occupied his talents for his entire career, and it gave him the opportunity to travel around the country, collecting and studying plant specimens. He also travelled abroad and accumulated abundant experience in the tropical plants and vegetation of Asia, while becoming acquainted with other important botanists of the region. Dr. Santisuk represented Thai botany, often presenting information about the Thai flora at international meetings. These activities strengthened networks of herbaria and botanical gardens in Asia, Europe, America, and Australia, and helped develop the Forest Herbarium into an important regional center for botanical study.

Dr. Santisuk became Director of the Forest Herbarium in 1993, where he devoted himself to further developing and improving Thai botanical science, especially in plant taxonomy. He helped to elevate the study of the Thai Flora to international standards, finding grants to maintain activities of the forest Herbarium and for BKF’s staff to study for advanced degrees abroad. Thawatchai was perhaps the most important protégé and successor of Prof. Tem Smitinand, the pioneering botanist (and active Siam Society leader) who was instrumental in initiating and promoting the Flora of Thailand Project in its early days. The Flora of Thailand Project involves the publication of a total inventory and description of all plant species of the country, family by family. It is a massive effort involving an international team of botanists from many countries who are the recognized experts in the various families and genera of plants of the world. Volumes of the Flora of Thailand (FOT) are produced periodically, and the project is nearing completion within a few years. The committee of the FOT meets biennially, alternately in Thailand and in another host country abroad. Heading this project, as Dr. Santisuk did for part of his career, requires leadership ability and an international reputation for scholarship.

Dr. Santisuk also promoted the establishment of botanical gardens under the authorization of the Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation, and was especially instrumental in establishing the Queen Sirikit Botanic Garden in Chiang Mai, of which he served on the executive board from the start. This is a beautiful and popular botanic garden for visitors, and also houses an important herbarium which specializes in the plants of northern Thailand.

In 1996, for his outstanding work throughout his career, Dr. Santisuk received an honor as Professor Emeritus in Forestry from Kasetsart University, and was appointed as a Fellow of the Academy of Science of The Royal Institute of Thailand. He also spent his leisure time working for the public as Leader of the Natural History Section of The Siam Society, Under Royal Patronage, in Bangkok. Dr. Santisuk worked as a member of the editorial board of the Natural History Bulletin of the Siam Society (NHBSS) from 1982 to 2014 of which he was an honorary editor (editor-in-chief) in 1985. Prof. Santisuk retired from his government position in 2004, but still served as supervisor in botany and forestry at the Department of National Parks, Wildlife, and Plant Conservation. He also served as a visiting professor to many universities, lecturing in diverse fields as plant taxonomy, forestry, palynology, and pharmaceutical botany. He supervised Ph.D. committees at Kasetsart University and Mahidol University. Prof. Santisuk also supported many activities of the Royal Projects concerning plants. On many occasions he accompanied Her Majesty Queen Sirikit and Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn on royal visits to rural areas and on trips abroad.

Dr. Santisuk was an outstanding botanist with a quiet and pleasant manner, and also a family man. He is survived by his wife Paiparn (Kepatara), a lecturer at the Department of Material Science, Faculty of Science, Chulalongkorn University. Together, they had a son named Chakorn Santisuk and now twin grandchildren (girls).

Prof. Santisuk passed away peacefully at Chulalongkorn Hospital on July 3, 2020, after a long sleep caused by a stroke. He was a great source of inspiration and courage for Thai botanists. With our deepest sympathies, he will be missed and remembered forever in our hearts.

For his more than 50 years of work on the Thai flora, Prof. Santisuk was honored by having several taxa named after him. The genus *Santisukia* Brummitt (Bignoniaceae) was named after him to acknowledge his contributions to the study of the Bignoniaceae, the first family that he contributed to the Flora of Thailand. He discovered the beautiful flowering tree *Bretschneidera sinensis* Hemsl. (Chomphu phu kha), family Akaniaceae, a rare species and a new record for Thailand from the mountain forests of Nan Province. The flowers of this tree appeared on the cover of the vol. 37 no. 2 (1989) issue of the NHBSS.

Weerachai Nanakorn

Leader of the Natural History Section
The Siam Society

Five species have been named in honour of Dr. Thawatchai Santisuk:

Croton santisukii Airy Shaw (plao santisuk), Kew Bull. 35 (2): 392 (1980).

Garcinia santisukiana Ngerns. & Suddee (nual santisuk), Kew Bull. 77 (1): 121 (2022).

Glochidion santisukii Airy Shaw (khrai yai), Kew Bull. 35 (2): 385 (1980).

Impatiens santisukii T. Shimizu (thian santisuk), Bull. Natl. Sci. Mus., Tokyo, B. 26 (2): 39 (2000).

Terminalia santisukiana Patthar. & Poopath (samo santisuk), Thai Forest Bull., Bot. 48 (2): 199 (2020).

New species discovered by Dr. Thawatchai Santisuk:

Acer chiangdaoense Santisuk (kuam chiang dao), Nordic J. Bot. 12 (6): 696 (1992) (1992).

Barnettia kerrii (Barnett & Sandwith) Santisuk (khae santisuk), Kew Bull. 28 (2): 174 (1973).

Barnettia pagetii (Craib) Santisuk (khae kan chanika), Kew Bull. 28 (2): 173 (1973).

Dolichandrone columnaris Santisuk (khae na), Bull. Mus. Natl. Hist. Nat., B, Adansonia Sér. 4, 7 (1): 100 (1985).

Markhamia stipulata var. *pierrei* (Dop) Santisuk (khaepa), Fl. Cambodge, Laos & Vietnam 22: 53 (1985): (1985).

Wrightia sirikitiae D.J. Middleton & Santisuk (moke rajinee), Thai Forest Bull., Bot. 29: 1 (2001).



Prof. Dr. Thawatchai Santisuk at his retirement ceremony on 29 September 2004 at Maruay Garden Hotel, Bangkok.



Prof. Dr. Thawatchai Santisuk (left) at the 7th Flora of Thailand Meeting in Chiang Mai in 1988 with Prof. Dr. Kai Larsen (Botanical Institute, Aarhus University, Denmark); Prof. Dr. Tem Smitinand (The Forest Herbarium, Bangkok, Thailand); and Prof. Dr. J. Vidal (Museum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris) (from left to right).



Prof. Dr. Thawatchai is investigating the Navamintarachinee Forest, Pang Mapha District, Mae Hong Song Province, northern Thailand in 2011. Photo by Manop Poopath.

Some noteworthy articles and references by Dr. Santisuk in English:

- Santisuk, T. 1973. Notes on Asiatic Bignoniaceae. *Kew Bulletin* 28 (2): 171–174.
- Santisuk, T. 1983. Taxonomy and distribution of terrestrial trees and shrubs in the mangrove formations of Thailand. *Natural History Bulletin of the Siam Society* 31 (1): 63–91.
- Santisuk, T. 1985. Bignoniaceae of mainland South-East Asia. *Natural History Bulletin of the Siam Society* 33 (2): 61–102.
- Santisuk, T. 1987. Bignoniaceae. In T. Smitinand & K. Larsen (eds.), *Flora of Thailand* 5 (1): 32–66. Chutima Press. Bangkok.
- Santisuk, T. 1988. An Account of the Vegetation of Northern Thailand. *Geoecological Research* 5. Stuttgart, Germany.
- Santisuk, T. 1989. The monotypic family Bretschneideraceae newly recorded for Thailand. *Natural History Bulletin of the Siam Society* 37 (2): 173–176.
- Santisuk, T. 1991. Plants for Our Future: Botanical Research and Conservation Needs in Thailand. Royal Forest Department, Thailand.
- Santisuk, T. 1992. Notes on the genus *Acer* (Aceraceae) in Thailand. *Nordic Journal of Botany* 12 (6): 695–698.
- Santisuk, T. 1997. Geographical and ecological distributions of the two tropical pines: *Pinus khesiya* and *Pinus merkusii*, in Southeast Asia. *Thai Forest Bulletin (Botany)* 23: 102–123.
- Santisuk, T. 1998. A systematic study of the genus *Acer* (Aceraceae) in Thailand. *Natural History Bulletin of the Siam Society* 46: 93–104.
- Santisuk, T. K. Chayamarith, R. Pooma, and S. Suddee. 2006. Thailand Red Data: Plants Office of Natural Resources and Environment Policy and Planning, Bangkok.
- Santisuk, T. 2017. Sapindaceae, addendum. In T. Santisuk and H. Baslev (eds.), *Flora of Thailand* 13 (3): 546–556. Prachachon Press. Bangkok.