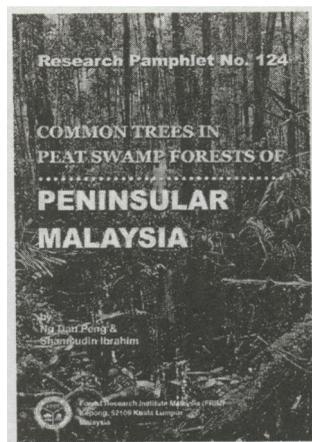


BOOK REVIEW

NG, T. P. & SHAMSUDIN, I. 2001. **Common trees in peat swamp forests of Peninsular Malaysia**. Research Pamphlet No. 124. Forest Research Institute Malaysia, Kepong. 96 pp. US\$80. ISBN 983-2181-07-0

Peatlands are waterlogged wetland ecosystems in which the extremely slow rate of decomposition results in the accumulation of dead plant matter (“peat”). Although they only occupy 3 to 7% of the Earth’s land area, the peat in peatlands accounts for nearly one-third of the global pool of soil-bound carbon. In recent years, there has been a great deal of research focused on whether global warming will result in accelerated rates of decomposition in peatlands and a release (primarily as methane) of the carbon stored in peatland soils. Since methane is a potent greenhouse gas, release of this gas from peatlands could result in a positive feedback loop: methane release accelerates global warming, which in turn accelerates drying, decomposition, and consequently, further methane release in peatlands. Most of the research on peatlands and global climate change in recent years has focused on peatlands in boreal North America and Europe. This is because of the extensive peatlands on these continents, resources available for research, and the ready availability of identification guides to the plants.



Tropical peatlands have received far less attention from researchers. Unlike their boreal cousins, tropical peatlands are dominated by trees. Although the species diversity of tropical peat forests is much lower than that of the better-known upland rain forests, the peat forests nonetheless support a wide range of species that have broad economic and ecological importance. This new research pamphlet provides foresters and researchers with a much-needed field guide to 56 of the most common tree species of the peat swamps of Peninsular Malaysia (out of a list of 130 species that occur in these swamps). The authors also provide a brief introduction to the ecology and management of these peat swamp forests.

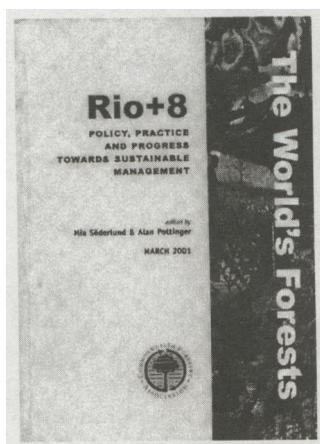
As with most field guides, the strengths of this book are the detailed descriptions of each tree and the exceptional photographs of each species. The authors have gone to great lengths to obtain wide-angle photographs, in the field, of the boles in the forest, and detailed close-up photographs of the bark, leaves, fruits, seeds and seedlings. While fewer than half of the tree species of these peat swamp forests are illustrated, nearly two-thirds (25 of 39) of the families are represented. In contrast to the detailed descriptions to enable the identifications of each tree, the attention given to the ecology and distribution of the trees is less rewarding. The type of data given is inconsistent (for example, neither elevational limits, nor restrictions to the eastern or western sides of the peninsula, nor the range outside of Peninsular Malaysia of all species are given). The authors provide a short description of the current commercial uses for each species. What makes this field guide useful to ecologists as well as foresters is that the authors included descriptions of many species that have no commercial use. Thus, the reader gets a good overall feeling for the diversity in these peat swamp forests, not just their utility as lumber sources.

The first few pages of the book provide a brief introduction to the ecology and management of peat swamp forests. This section is much less satisfying than the species descriptions. The description of the forest’s distribution, hydrology and structure is scant and will not help a newcomer to these forests understand them better. The presentation of

forest production, conservation and threats to these forests is even-handed, but I also was left hoping for much more detail on all of these.

Overall, this book will be an excellent resource for foresters and ecologists trying to learn how to identify the common trees in peat swamp forests of Peninsular Malaysia. Although the book is expensive (similar books in the United States would sell for about one-quarter the price of this one) and its tight focus on Peninsular Malaysia will limit its sales outside of that area, the authors and FRIM are to be commended for producing a first-rate field guide.

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SÖDERLUND, M. & POTTINGER, A. 2001. **Rio+8: Policy, Practice and Progress Towards Sustainable Forest Management.** The Commonwealth Forestry Association, Oxford, UK. 310 pp. US\$20. ISBN 0-9515059-3-9.

Over the last decade, beginning with the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, a number of international initiatives and intergovernmental policy dialogues on forest issues have taken place. This publication represents a compendium of the forest policy developments aimed at sustainable forest management that have taken place under the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF) as well as under other international and high-level initiatives. Some people (be they national negotiators, officials or scientists working in the forestry field) may have an interest to learn more about international forest issues and intergovernmental negotiations of such issues. However, they may have no or little previous knowledge on the subject matter, insufficient time or perseverance to minutely plough through an almost infinite number of often scattered official IFF documents written in UN format as well as not easily obtained official reports, case studies, keynote and background papers. In such a case this book presents them a quick but useful reference point for all important international forest policy developments during the period 1997–2000. In this regard, the contributing authors to this volume have done a superb job in facilitating access to such information to all those interested and fulfilled one of the objectives of the Commonwealth Forestry Association, that is, to exchange information on forestry and forest policy through its range of publications.

The first part of the book takes the reader on a familiarisation course on the outcomes achieved at the IFF process which took place between 1997 and 2000. The IFF process demonstrated the international community's political will to reach consensus on many complex sustainable forest management issues and the need for sustained efforts to implement proposals and programmes. The most concrete outcome of the process was the formulation of a wide-ranging set of proposals for action (PFA) tabled during the