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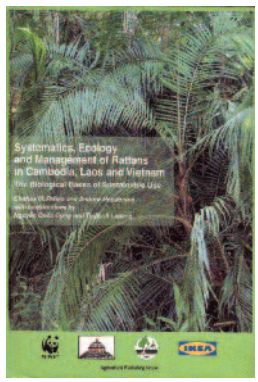
PALM LITERATURE

SYSTEMATICS, ECOLOGY AND MANAGEMENT OF RATTANS IN CAMBODIA, LAOS AND VIETNAM. THE BIOLOGICAL BASES OF SUSTAINABLE USE – Charles M. Peters and Andrew Henderson with contributions from Nguyen Quoc Dong and Thibault Ledecq. WWF/IKEA/NYBG. 2014. Pp. 234, numerous maps and color photographs throughout. Agricultural Publishing House. "Not for sale" – available as a free digital download at http://wwf.panda.org/who_we_are/wwf_offices/laos/newsrom/?216070/wwf-launches-first-ever-book-on-mekong-rattan-species



This attractive book, available in English, Khmer, Vietnamese and Lao language versions, aims to help both naturalists and those in the rattan industry to identify rattan species, while providing guidance in maximizing yields and achieving sustainable production of rattan resources. It is really useful to have so much information on Indochinese rattans available in a single volume. The book is divided into five chapters. Chapter I provides a brief description of the region and major biophysical factors that control rattan distribution and abundance, and also a brief outline of rattan trade. Chapter II, the botanical foundation of the work, is a field guide to the rattans of Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam and includes a dichotomous key to 65 different rattan species. Each species is represented by a double page spread with text on the left hand side – local names, brief descriptions, distribution and habitat, flowering and fruiting behavior and uses, and facing it on the right hand page a map and three diagnostic photos, usually illustrating sheathed stem, leaf and some part of reproductive material. Chapter III discusses rattan ecology, presenting data on the density, size-class distribution and annual growth of selected species and conservation assessments. Chapter IV provides data collection protocols and analyses required to define a sustainable harvest of wild rattan, together with a discussion of impact monitoring and periodic harvest adjustments. Chapter V examines the future of the rattan trade in the region. The authors boldly claim that the book is unique in addressing all these aspects of rattan in a single volume.

The press release for the book cited above (and the source of a free digital download) makes a bold statement – "the first ever book on Mekong rattan species" – that invites closer scrutiny. First ever? Surely not! The book is pre-empted by Evans et al. (2001) *Field Guide to the Rattans of Lao PDR* published in English and Lao. Although the Lao book's title suggests it covers just the Lao PDR, it covers the entire area of Lao PDR, Vietnam and Cambodia and neighboring parts of China and Thailand and includes accounts of 51 species. Where the earlier book differs is that it lacks the species that Henderson and his co-workers have described from the region since 2001 and also lacks the material on ecology, data collection protocols and trade and harvest. At one point

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in the Peters and Henderson book, Evans et al. 2001 is acknowledged along with a more geographically restricted guide for Cambodia (Khou Eang Hourt 2008 – mentioned in text but missing from Literature Cited). However, no mention is made of the substantial careful systematic monograph of Indochinese rattans published by Evans et al. (2002) that is fundamental to understanding the taxonomy of rattans in this region.

The bulk of the book, in fact pages 19–168, is taken up by the field guide (Field guide? At 24 × 16.5 cm, this may not be the most convenient size for the field and gloss paper throughout invites problems with dampness). There is an all too brief glossary with important terms missing (no mention of ruminate and homogeneous, which pops up almost immediately in couplet 2 in the key, for example). The key would have benefitted from clearer formatting. I regret the fact that species are arranged alphabetically – easy to find your way around if you are already familiar with the species, but not if you are trying to identify species you are not certain of and where closely related species are scattered through the 149 pages. Perhaps this could have been offset if related species were discussed in the text under each species – but they are not. This is most unfortunate, especially when there is almost always plenty of blank space at the end of each species. This is the great strength of the Evans et al. field guide where related species, most similar species or species that could be confused with the species under question are always indicated and quick notes provided on how they differ. In the end, I suspect that most users of the new book will try to identify species by thumbing through the photos. The color photographs are indeed supremely useful and should allow easy comparison between species. I have to applaud the collection of high quality photographs, the vast majority taken of living specimens and representing no mean feat. The maps are impressive, but with color background and orange-red dots they will be largely unreadable by anyone with red/green color blindness. There is much to be said for simple gray scale or black and white maps with black dots.

Chapter III includes much of real interest, in particular the results of inventories of rattans and cane lengths from various forest areas within the region. The results, not surprisingly, clearly show the scarcity of harvestable cane of the elite species. A table in Chapter III summarizes extent of occurrence data from which IUCN conservation criteria can be derived. Astonishingly these criteria (Critically Endangered, Endangered, Vulnerable etc.) are not clearly indicated. It would have been so easy to add these assessments to each species in Chapter II. The development of protocols for rattan inventories, refined from the experiences of previous workers and his own extensive experience presented by Charles Peters in Chapter IV should be immensely useful to future workers needing to make assessments of the standing crop of rattan and potential yields.

One aspect of rattans almost completely missing from this book is rattan cultivation; brief mention is made under six of the 65 species accounts that they are planted, but that is all. It seems strange that a book aimed at the sustainable management of rattan does not discuss cultivation in any more detail. The large scale intensive cultivation of *Calamus tenuis* and other species for palm hearts is unique to the Mekong area and northeastern Thailand and deserves detailed mention along with attempts to grow *Calamus tetradactylus* and other species on a plantation scale.

Anyone working with rattan in the Indochinese region will need this book, but I suggest that for rattan identification they will also continue to find the earlier field guide by Evans et al. invaluable for its clever design and ease of use.

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