

Hugh Harries 1940–2019

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Hugh Harries, doyen of the world of coconuts, passed away on 7th February 2019, after a short illness. He was preeminent in the field of natural history, origin and dissemination of the coconut and held many stimulating ideas.

After graduation in 1962 (BSc Horticulture, London University) he worked for the UK Agricultural Research Council as a plant breeder for five years before taking up a career as a tropical agriculturalist in the Caribbean in 1968. There he spent over ten years as a botanist/plant breeder for the Coconut Industry Board in Jamaica. In 1983 he moved

to Southeast Asia where he spent five years as a technical cooperation officer for the UK Overseas Development Administration (ODA) in Thailand. In the Pacific he spent five years as chief agronomist to New Britain Palm Oil Development in Papua New Guinea. Six years were spent in Africa with both the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ) and

ODA, on coconut and cashew projects in Tanzania. He moved back to Latin America for four years as Researcher at Centro de Investigación Científica (CICY), Merida, Yucatan in Mexico. Between appointments he undertook short-term consultancies in a further 20 countries for national, bilateral, international, commercial or environmental organizations concerned with smallholder and plantation tree crops. Since 1978, when he wrote the seminal "The evolution, dissemination and classification of *Cocos nucifera*" in *Botanical Review* (44: 265–320), his goal was to illuminate the exceptional importance of the coconut palm since earliest times. Among his many lasting achievements are the development of a commercial method to breed lethal yellowing resistant, wind-storm tolerant F1 hybrid coconuts in Jamaica. He also coordinated the FAO coconut breeders' consultative committee and published an hypothesis on coconut evolution. Latterly he expanded his specialist knowledge in production of disease resistant and improved coconut planting material by breeding and tissue culture to include date and oil palm, cashew and even frankincense.

In 1999, he set up the Centre for Information on Coconut Lethal Yellowing (CICLY) that acted as a clearing-house for information about lethal yellowing and similar diseases of coconuts and other palms. The CICLY website was discontinued in 2011.

Since 2001, he was the Moderator of The Coconut Time Line, an internet message board devoted to all aspects of coconut. He was an Honorary Research Associate at the Herbarium, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (Herbarium) and also a Volunteer Guide in the Gardens.

For the last ten years or so of his life, Hugh was afflicted with Parkinson's disease, yet he continued to moderate the Coconut Time Line and think about coconut evolution and publish. His spirit seemed indomitable. The world of coconuts has lost a titan and he will be much missed.

Hugh C. Harries Bibliography

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