



Professor Dr. Pieter Baas, 2005.

Portret painted by Carla Rodenberg and presented to Pieter on the occasion of his retirement.

PIETER BAAS RETIRES

Pieter Baas retired this year on 1 April from his position as Professor of Systematic Botany at Leiden University and on 1 September as Director of the Nationaal Herbarium Nederland (NHN)¹. On 11 October 2005 he presented his valedictory lecture to the academic community and the assembled Dutch systematic and biodiversity world. On that occasion a well-deserved Royal Decoration (Knight in the Order of the Lion of the Netherlands) was bestowed on him to acknowledge his many outstanding services. We wholeheartedly congratulate him with this high distinction. The same day some 250 people joined his farewell party. Some of Pieter's idiosyncrasies and qualities were highlighted in a very humorous series of sketches and songs by members of the NHN staff.

Pieter Baas was born on 28 April 1944. He studied Biology at Leiden University from 1962 until 1969. Pieter started his career at the RH on 1 August 1969, after a year at the Jodrell Laboratory (Royal Botanic Gardens Kew) sponsored by a British Council Scholarship. He was appointed to build and curate wood and microscopic slide collections and to carry out comparative anatomical research. His research concentrated on the wood and leaf anatomy of the Aquifoliaceae and later of the Icacinaceae, Celastraceae, Oleaceae, and several other families, and was not geographically restricted to Malesia. His prime objectives focused on the phylogenetic and ecological significance of wood anatomical characters. In the early years he also was involved in teaching anatomical BSc-courses in the Biology curriculum of Leiden University. Pieter got his PhD (*cum laude*) in 1975 on his thesis entitled 'Comparative anatomy of *Ilex*, *Nemopanthus*, *Sphenostemon*, *Phelline* and *Oncotheca*'.

After many visits to neighbouring countries and the USA, he visited Asia for the first time in 1981; numerous visits followed – also to many other parts of the world – and he turned into a real globe-trotter. He has always been an excellent diplomat for the NHN, for wood science, for biodiversity collections, and for systematics, while attending meetings and congresses, and visiting institutes, agencies, and even field stations all over the world.

In 1987 he was appointed as Extraordinary Professor of the Systematic Plant Anatomy, a chair endowed by the Leiden University Fund, a position which he officially accepted with an inaugural lecture in February 1988.

His involvement in Malesian botany became most visible as chairman of the Organizing committee of the first Flora Malesiana Symposium in Leiden in 1989.

1) The Rijksherbarium (RH) was the University Herbarium of Leiden until 1988. Then it was merged with the Hortus Botanicus to form the research institute Rijksherbarium/Hortus Botanicus (RHHB) until 1999. From that time onwards, the Herbarium and the Hortus were formally separated and the Herbarium became the Leiden University branch of the decentralized Nationaal Herbarium Nederland (NHN-L); the other branches being the University herbaria of Utrecht and Wageningen.

On 1 January 1991 he succeeded Prof. Dr. C. Kalkman as Scientific Director of the RHHB and Professor of Systematic Botany at Leiden University.

Pieter has always made a strong point to enhance national and international cooperation. At the national level he was a driving force to increase cooperation between the Dutch systematic and biodiversity collection institutes. This has resulted in full participation of the NHN and its branches in, e.g., the Research School Biodiversity (since 1992), the Dutch consortium of biodiversity collection institutes (NL-TAF, since 1997), and the Dutch branch of GBIF (NL-BIF, since 2002).

In 1993 a doom scenario for the RHHB was unfolded by the Board of the Faculty of Sciences of Leiden University, implying budget cuts of up to 50% as the Board stated that they could only be responsible for, and thus provide funding for, the teaching and teaching-related research of the RHHB; the collections they regarded of international value and therefore to be funded from national and international sources. The first six years of Pieter's directorship were thus dominated by fighting this scenario and raising support for safeguarding the financial position of the RHHB. In that period a general peer review of all biological university groups took place, which resulted in an overcritical judgment of systematics. This was so obviously due to lack of systematic expertise among the peers, that Pieter successfully solicited more focused international peer reviews. In the mid-nineties two peer reviews took place, one of the RHHB alone and the other of all systematic research groups in the Netherlands. Both came to positive conclusions endorsing the high international quality of the RHHB. These reviews have been instrumental in arguing for the survival of the institute. In the same period the RHHB moved from the Rapenburg and Schelpenkade buildings to its present accommodation, the Van Steenis building. Thanks to Pieter's connections, Her Majesty Queen Beatrix officially opened this facility. That ceremony, with the responsible Minister and entire University Board in attendance, has been very influential in raising more public awareness and support. The whole process eventually resulted in 1999 in the founding of the NHN as a decentralized merger of the university herbaria of Leiden, Utrecht and Wageningen. The Ministry of Science, Culture and Education provided an earmarked budget for the maintenance of the collections and the inseparable tasks of research and teaching of taxonomy. Since the start of this century, Pieter's prime task has been to enhance the synergy between the three branches, and to safeguard the position of first the Wageningen and later the Utrecht branch.

Pieter's directorship can be characterized by his ability to keep the herbarium ship afloat in a very dynamic and changing world. When the first signs of severe budget cuts became clear, he asked for the institute's mandate to take what he thought to be the best steps. With full and unanimous support of the staff, he did much of the fighting for survival of the herbarium on his own and the founding of the NHN is for the largest part his personal success, for which he deserves all credit. When recently the Utrecht position became at stake, Pieter initiated strategic thinking towards a national biodiversity collection centre to safeguard all Dutch biodiversity collections and related research for the long term. We are greatly indebted to him for all these efforts.

Whereas on the one hand plans for budget cuts were launched, on the other hand substantial investments were needed to keep up with newly developing research lines. After the methodological revolutions of the seventies/eighties, it was now molecular phylogenetics that emerged together with computerization of systematic and collection-

based information; also biodiversity assessments and large-scale quantitative spatial analyses became urgent. Pieter facilitated the initiation of these innovative approaches and incorporated them in the research programs.

Molecular studies started off in cooperation with and using laboratory facilities of sister groups in the universities of Amsterdam, Groningen and Utrecht and of the Mycological institute in Baarn (now in Utrecht). Following the recommendations of the peer reviews in-house facilities were created, which resulted in a joint molecular laboratory together with the Natural History Museum *Naturalis* and the Leiden Institute for Biology. In each of the three branches a permanent position for a molecular systematist was created, together with PhD and postdoc projects. The latest development is an Ancient DNA laboratory to use herbarium and museum collections and other plant or animal remains for extracting DNA sequences.

Data basing of collection information could be boosted thanks to a number of large NWO grants. The NHN was one of the first to enable web-based consultation of specimens by adding digital images including the plants and original labels. The boom of multi-media presentations of systematic knowledge and identification tools is obvious from the large number of CD-ROMs and web-based information systems which have been produced in the last decade.

Quantitative spatial analyses and biodiversity assessments have grown into important activities to exploit the available expertise and collection-based information for urgent biodiversity issues.

Pieter remained the same charming person throughout his career. Being an extrovert person, his charm and sometimes laconic attitude allowed him on occasions to be more open and direct than others, without people feeling offended. During ups and downs he kept his good spirit. Becoming more and more secure in his functioning as director, he became more dominant and had difficulties to delegate tasks. He loved to be in the centre of attention, which was clear during the last Flora Malesiana Symposium and at his farewell ceremony. Now he is free from institutional responsibilities he seems more relaxed. We all hope that he can enjoy his freedom for a long time, and remain at the centre of attention in such a positive way.

We wish Pieter a very happy retirement, and we are fortunate to have him in the institute as an active honorary staff member.

MARCO ROOS

Eponymy

Ilex baasii B.C. Stone & Kiew
Baasoxylon Wheeler

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