

**NEW TAXA TO COMMEMORATE THE OPENING OF THE
VAN STEENIS BUILDING BY
HER MAJESTY QUEEN BEATRIX**

INTRODUCTION

Systematic botany is about the discovery, description, naming, and understanding of plant diversity. Of these four aspects the naming and describing of new species belongs to the most traditional, yet exciting activities of the plant taxonomist. On the occasion of the official opening of the Van Steenis Building by Her Majesty Queen Beatrix, we indulge in presenting species and one genus, new to science, and named to commemorate this auspicious event.

The Van Steenis Building provides the new and highly functional premises for the Rijksherbarium, the Centre for Environmental Science, and the facilities for the undergraduate study of biology of Leiden University. Prof. Dr. C.G.G.J. van Steenis (1901–1986) was an unrivalled authority of Malesian botany but he also was a pioneer in tropical vegetation science, ecology and nature conservation. During his directorship of the Rijksherbarium (1962–1972) the institute flourished as never before. The moss species *Dicranoloma steenisii* Klazenga is named in his honour, and adds another taxon to the rich eponymy commemorating this great botanist. We are very honoured that his widow, Mrs. Van Steenis-Kruseman will be present at the opening ceremony. It may seem ironic that the inauguration of the building which carries Van Steenis's name is celebrated with the launching of new taxa. The credo of Van Steenis was that we should endeavour to determine how few, not how many species are comprised in the flora of a region. Of course he was absolutely right in criticising the light-hearted description of new species on the basis of slightly deviating plant specimens. The new taxa presented here have nothing in common with these ephemeral blemishes on botanical nomenclature; they are good and distinct species recognised by specialists from the 'Leiden School', who are renowned for their tendency to lump rather than to split.

Most of the new species were not recently found in the field, but discovered in the herbarium in the process of monographic systematic study. There is an important message here for biodiversity research policy: biological collections in herbaria and museums harbour the greatest and most efficiently accessible wealth of taxonomic diversity imaginable. Not only for discovering new species, but also for providing base-line data on all species of a regional or national flora. In this age of biodiversity informatics herbarium collections are the richest source to be tapped for establishing monitor projects and thus to acquire insights into the effects of human intervention on plant biodiversity. It would be foolish for any government to have high aspirations for sustainable use and conservation of biodiversity resources, while at the same time neglecting their national herbarium collections. It is gratifying that the physical conditions for curating the Rijksherbarium collections are now better than they have been for a very long time, thanks to the wise investments by the Board of

Leiden University. I express the hope that the immense, and for a great part still untapped, information content of our collections will remain accessible through the funding of a sufficient staff for their collection management and scientific curation.

The Rijksherbarium/Hortus Botanicus co-ordinates a large Human Capital and Mobility Network in Europe on the Plant Diversity of the Indo-Pacific Region, funded by the European Union. During the preparations for the official opening, our Scottish Fellow in the Dublin node of the network, Dr. D.J. Middleton submitted a new genus in the Apocynaceae for publication, *Ecua*, a climber from Maluku, Indonesia, named to commemorate the currency in which the research was funded. He kindly agreed to include this new genus in the list of taxa to be launched at the opening of the Van Steenis Building. A tribute to financial support needed for basic plant biodiversity research is not out of place on this occasion.

In 1829 the Rijksherbarium was founded in Brussels by Royal Decree of King William I of the then united Netherlands. In 1996 Her Majesty Queen Beatrix is the first reigning monarch to visit the Rijksherbarium, part of the Research Institute Rijksherbarium/Hortus Botanicus of Leiden University. In the intervening period we have looked after a unique herbarium collection from Luxembourg donated to King William III in the late 19th Century, and identified herbarium specimens collected by Her Royal Highness Princess Juliana when she was still a schoolgirl. Several times the Hortus Botanicus has welcomed members of the royal family for informal visits. It is therefore with great pleasure that we dedicate a fern species, *Microsorium aurantiacum* Noot. to the Royal House of Orange. Not less than seven species are named in various ways after Her Majesty Queen Beatrix herself: *Galerina beatricis* Bas, *Entoloma reginae* Noordel. & Chrispijn, *Selliguea sri-ratu* Hovenkamp, *Bulbophyllum gemma-reginae* J.J. Vermeulen, *Chelonistele laetitia-reginae* de Vogel, *Goniothalamus majestatis* P. Keßler, and *Alstonia beatricis* Sidiyasa. These species are representative of only part of the phylads studied at the Rijksherbarium/Hortus Botanicus, yet range from the Agaricales of the higher fungi, through mosses and ferns to the angiosperms. Only two are from the Netherlands, the remainder is from tropical Malesia, where so many species remain to be described, and the majority of plant biodiversity is still insufficiently understood, despite the urgent societal need for plant taxonomic information.

We dedicate this bouquet of new taxa respectfully to Her Majesty Queen Beatrix, and express our appreciation for her active interest in our institute.

Leiden, 11 June 1996
Pieter Baas, Director