

JEFFREY JAMES WOOD (1952–2019)



Jeffrey Wood. Chan Chew Lun

Jeffrey Wood was one of the foremost orchid taxonomists of his generation. His knowledge of the orchids of tropical Asia was unsurpassed and he was a prolific author of authoritative accounts of the orchids of the region.

Jeffrey's fascination with plants can be traced back to his childhood. He was born in Bournemouth on 28th November 1952 and, as an only child, he developed a passion for gardening and had an excellent knowledge of garden plants and also of the native British flora. With this background, his choice of career was clearly preordained and, on leaving school at 18, Jeffrey immediately joined the staff of the Natural History Museum. A year later he transferred to the staff of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, as assistant scientific officer in the Orchid Herbarium, where he remained for the rest of his working life. He initially worked for Peter Hunt (1971), then Peter Taylor (1972–1985) and finally for me (1985–2006), eventually succeeding me as the sixth curator of the orchid herbarium until his retirement in 2012.

Jeffrey's knowledge of tropical Asiatic orchids was encouraged early in his career by Eric Holttum, formerly Director of the Singapore Botanic Garden and Professor at the University of Singapore before

his retirement to Kew. He could not have chosen a better teacher because Holttum was the author of an authoritative account of the *Orchids of Malaya* (1953) and, with Eric Laycock, co-founded the Singapore orchid industry by hybridising native species and introducing modern propagation methods to the region.

In 1976, Jeffrey joined Martin Sands, a senior colleague, on a tough three-month expedition to Manus Island and New Ireland in Papua New Guinea. The fine collections from these remote and previously almost unexplored islands now grace the Kew Herbarium. They include many novelties, a number of which were described as new to science by Jeffrey. Later expeditions, in Sumatra with Jim Comber and in Borneo with Tony Lamb, enhanced his already substantial knowledge of the orchids of the region. He worked closely with Gunnar Seidenfaden, the eminent Danish diplomat and botanist, and collaborated with him on the substantial *The Orchids of Peninsula Malaysia and Singapore* (1992).

On his visits to Sabah, he met the naturalist and publisher Chan Chew Lun who became a close friend and supported Jeffrey's work for many years. He also began a lengthy collaboration with Tony Lamb and Professor John Beaman, then seconded from his university in Michigan to the university in Kota Kinabalu. These collaborations led to numerous authoritative and often magnificently illustrated accounts of the orchids of south-east Asia, including *The Orchids of Sarawak* (2001) and *The Orchids of Mount Kinabalu* (2011). For further details of these and other major publications, see *Orchid Research Newsletter* 74 (2019).

For four or five years between 1971 and 1976, Jeffrey warded the only known British site for *Cypripedium calceolus* (Lady's-slipper). It was a lonely job, camping in a damp hollow, but it did improve his knowledge of the local flora. His interest in British, European and Mediterranean orchids continued throughout his Kew career, sustained by annual holidays in France and elsewhere in the Mediterranean, where he could indulge his passion for plants and plant-hunting. For many years, he was the BSBI orchid referee, identifying members' discoveries, answering queries and hosting

some members at Kew, notably Derek Turner Ettliger and David Lang. His knowledge of the European orchid flora encouraged Desmond Meikle, a senior colleague, to ask Jeffrey to write the orchid account for his *Flora of Cyprus* (1977, 1985). His treatment of Cypriot orchids remains the most authoritative, despite the many subsequent accounts of this rich assemblage of orchids on an island where recognising dozens of micro-species has become a major hobby.

Jeffrey retired to Bristol in 2012 to follow his passion for gardening and travel, albeit far too briefly. His

occasional trips to London were to meet up with his old friends from south-east Asia, when they visited Kew, and with former colleagues. He died unexpectedly on 2nd February 2019 from complications following a flu-like infection. His contribution to our knowledge of Asiatic orchids has been substantial and he will be sorely missed by his friends and colleagues.

Phillip Cribb