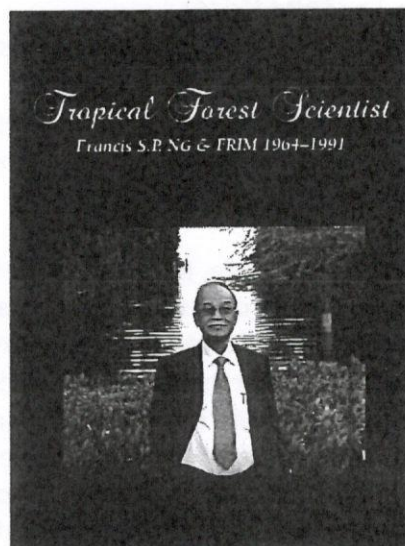


**BOOK REVIEW: Tropical Forest Scientist.
Francis S.P. Ng and FRIM 1964–1991.
Francis S.P. Ng. 2018.**

Kepong, Kuala Lumpur: Forest Research Institute Malaysia. 25.5 × 19 cm, softcover, 200 pp. ISBN 978-967-2149-07-1 (softcover), price RM30.



As its title indicates, this is both autobiography and anecdotal history of the Forest Research Institute Malaysia, or FRIM as it is better known. It is a fascinating read for anyone interested in botany and forestry, but not just for its stimulating scientific and technical content. The narrative tells the story of the Merdeka generation to whom the book is dedicated – the struggles fought as Malaysia established itself after Independence from British rule. Francis Ng is a wonderful story-teller, though he is not telling of fictional events. The many characters in his account are all real and it is at times perhaps brave of him that he recounts some moments of tension without fear of rebuke. It is also clear that either he has a remarkable memory or has been very thorough in writing down the day-to-day happenings over so many years. It is hard to know where to pick examples from, as the book has many entertaining moments. The story of Frank White riding a Vespa and the ostrich encounter on a country road in Zambia (page 46) is a classic. Likewise the phenomenon of crown shyness in Kapur (*Dryobalanops aromatica*), pages 85–86. The conservation of species and habitats is a recurring theme, as it should be, and it is pleasing to note that Francis and his FRIM colleagues were prepared to stick their necks out to highlight the wanton destruction of pristine areas for human gain and nature's loss, even resorting to an expensive newspaper advertising campaign (pp. 73–75). The remarkable sapwood of the Jelutong (*Dyera costulata*), one of Southeast Asia's tallest trees, is a revelation (p. 156). I had not imagined that the wood of any large tree could all be alive, as opposed to the more usual division between dead heartwood and living sapwood, but the Jelutong apparently has a trunk that is entirely alive and suffused throughout with a latex that prevents anything from eating or decaying it!

In conclusion we can all learn a lot from Francis Ng's exceptional career, and his contributions to Malaysian botany and forest science are of a significance that has seldom been equalled. It is a delight that we can benefit from his decision to tell his story so frankly and graphically. The book is well illustrated too and FRIM is to be congratulated for the decision to publish it.

Nigel P. Taylor
Singapore Botanic Gardens

Review

Tropical Forest Scientist

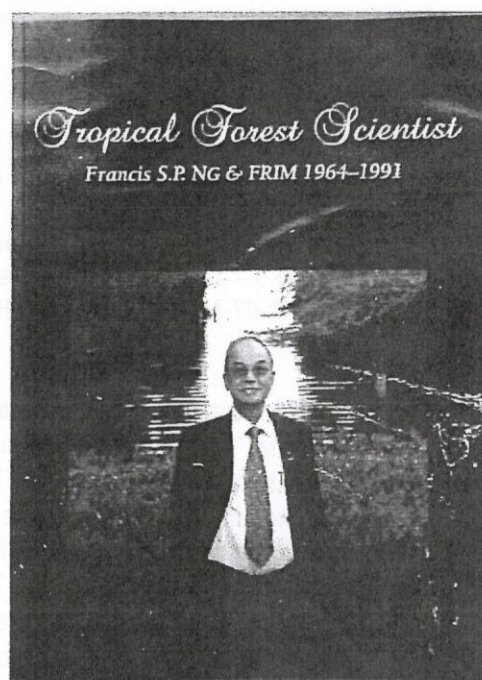
by Francis Ng

Published by FRIM (2018)

Price: RM30.00, available at FRIM bookshop

This is an autobiography of Dr Francis Ng, a Fellow of the Academy of Sciences Malaysia, and a member of SFTGS.

In an easy-to-read style, it traces his life-long career at the Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM) – so it is also a story of FRIM in its early days. Dr Ng started as a First Year Pupil Botanist in 1964 when he returned fresh from University of Tasmania where he had pursued a Bachelor of Science degree, financed by a Colombo Plan scholarship. In 1965, he went to Oxford University for his DPhil, the only Malaysian at Wolfson College.



He retired in 1990 from service while holding the post of Deputy Director General of FRIM. The book tells the history of FRIM in the opening chapters, then proceeds in the form of journal entries detailing his frequent expeditions into the forests of Malaysia where he made important observations and discoveries. These field notes are interspersed with interesting snippets describing the nature of tropical forest trees. For example, unlike temperate forests when leaves fall in the autumn and new shoots and flowers appear in spring, in the tropics there are no fixed seasons. Forest trees can flower and fruit sporadically throughout the year, but are also characterised by gregarious flowering when many different species will flower at the same time. This is followed some months later by mast fruiting when there is an abundance of fruits to feed the forest fauna. Fruit (and seed) collection is best timed during mast fruiting.

World recognition as one of the top tropical forest scientists is evident from the many invitations from around the globe received by Dr Ng to speak at international conferences, write chapters in books, and serve on various committees.

The scientific findings by Dr Ng and FRIM are presented in a clear manner which even a layman can grasp. The book also provides moments of tension due to the undercurrents which arose from FRIM tussling to become an autonomous research institution, free from being subservient to the Department of Forestry.

A good read which promises entertainment as well as an introduction to and lessons in forestry science.

Review by:

Tan Swee Lian, President of SFTGS