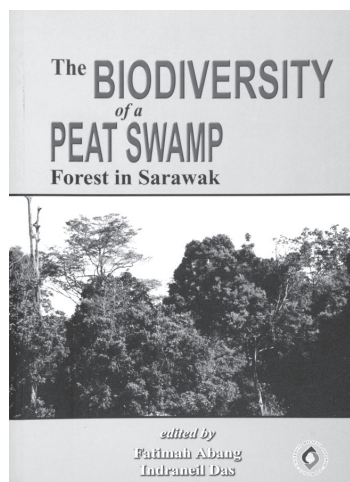




The Biodiversity of a Peat Swamp Forest in Sarawak. Edited by Fatimah Abang and Idraneil Das, 2006. Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, i–vii + 142 pages. ISBN: 983-9257-45-5.

This is a compact 21.2cm × 15.4cm soft-cover volume, with matt-textured book cover of a peat swamp forest. It documents the three to

five years' worth of research put in by researchers from the Institute of Biodiversity and Environment Conservation (IBEC) and various faculties based at the Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS). This volume documents various aspects of biological diversity found at the plot of peat swamp forest adjacent to the UNIMAS temporary campus at Kota Samarahan. Sarawak currently holds the largest expanse of peat swamp habitat in Malaysia, with over 1.6 million ha (16,000 km²). This habitat has been overlooked by scientists and over-exploited by land developments.

The volume starts with an interesting foreword written by a pioneer worker on peat swamp fauna, the current director of the Raffles Museum of Biodiversity Research. There are 10 topics covered in this compact volume:

- a review of peat swamp forests in Sarawak: it provides a general introduction to the unique habitat of peat swamp forests in Sarawak and gives a list of trees of commercial value, brief description of peat swamp silviculture practices, different land use of cleared peat swamps and conservation strategies;
- microfungi: a total of 128 species from 59 genera of epiphytic, senescent and leaf litter community of microfungi were identified, and it shows that the fungal growth is limited and present on between 5.9 and 60.6 % of leaves sampled;
- plant diversity and commercial timber: selected commercial timber species located in peat swamp forests are briefly described;
- floristic structure and tree species composition: a sample plot of 1 ha (0.01 km²) was established and a total of 1,600 individual trees of 167 species from 39 families were identified;

- invertebrate fauna: a preliminary listing of invertebrates were sampled from the forest edges using various methods, covering crustaceans (two species), mollusks (six species), arachnids (eight species), myriapods (two species) and insects (74 species), and from light traps, a further 688 species of macro- and micromoths enumerated;
- fish fauna: a list of 15 species from six families was provided, along with a brief review of the status of blackwater fish surveys in Malaysia (with many spelling errors);
- amphibian fauna: a list of 12 species from three families was provided, no endemic or species of special scientific interest were collected from the brief surveys;
- reptile fauna: an annotated list of 13 lizards and eight snakes were collected, showing a high proportion of arboreal species;
- avifauna: a total of 679 birds representing 67 species from 25 families were mist-netted and indicates that peat swamp forests are not a low priority habitat in terms of bird abundance and diversity;
- mammal fauna: a total of 24 species from 14 families of seven orders were obtained via several collection methods.

This work by the respective authors is highly commendable, in spite of the extreme difficulties of working in a peat swamp forest habitat (pers. obs.). Although this current work only covers a small area of peat swamp forest habitat, it is nonetheless the first compilation to cover such a wide range of biological diversity from a peat swamp forest habitat. The editors are to be applauded for highlighting the dire situation of peat swamps in Sarawak.

An excellent volume for any naturalist, scientist or lay person interested in knowing more about peat swamp forest biodiversity.

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