NOTES AND NEWS

MICHAEL WILLMER FORBES TWEEDIE
(1907-1993)

BY

PETER K. L. NG

Department of Zoology, National University of Singapore, Kent Ridge, Singapore 0511, Republic of Singapore

Between the 1930s and 1960s, one of the most active and renowned zoological museums in Southeast Asia was the Raffles Museum in Singapore. One of the key reasons for its success was undoubtedly because of its curator and later director, Michael Willmer Forbes Tweedie, one of the best known naturalists the region has ever produced. During his time in the Raffles Museum, Michael Tweedie was renowned for his work in many disciplines, ranging from archaeology, ethnology and geology to various fields of zoology, including carcinology.

Michael Tweedie was born on September 2nd 1907 in England. From 1925, he studied Geology, Zoology and Botany in the University of Cambridge, and in 1929, joined the Shell Oil Company in Venezuela as a palaeontologist. In 1932, he joined the then Raffles Museum as a curator. In his 25 years at the Raffles Museum, the collections in the Raffles Museum grew at a breathtaking pace. Tweedie conducted numerous field trips throughout Malaysia and its neighbouring isles, making collections of large numbers of different groups. While his predecessors in the museum had concentrated on birds and mammals, Tweedie devoted himself to the lower vertebrates and invertebrates. Because carcinology had always been one of his favourite disciplines, it was not surprising that the crab collections in the museum became particularly impressive. Between 1934 and 1963, Tweedie published 25 technical and popular papers on crab and stomatopods, describing four new genera and 32 new species from Peninsular Malaysia, Singapore, Sarawak (Borneo) and Cocos-Keeling Islands.

Tweedie’s direct work on crustaceans, however, represented only one facet of his immense contributions to Southeast Asian zoology. Tweedie tried his best to ensure that his collections were examined by experts in their respective fields and he frequently sent out specimens, including his beloved crabs, for study. Many of the decapods and stomatopods collected by Tweedie and his colleagues have been reported on by Jean Roux, Melbourne Ward, Heinrich Balss, Alida M. Buitendijk, Jacques Forest, C. J. Shen, Raoul Serène, Richard Bott, Desmond Johnson and Raymond Manning. These workers honoured
Tweedie by naming eight crabs and stomatopods after him, including a new xanthid genus *Tweedieia*. All in all, 32 genera, species and subspecies of crustaceans, arachnids, chilopods, butterflies, molluscs, reptiles and fish are now named after Michael Tweedie.

Tweedie was also well known for his work in two other fields—ichthyology and herpetology. His work on Malaysian freshwater fishes highlighted the striking diversity of the ichthyofauna in the Malay Peninsula. His studies, together with those of A. W. C. T. Herre and G. S. Myers in the 1930s, substantially increased what was known of the Malayan fish fauna. His book on the snakes of Malaya (Tweedie, 1953a, second edition 1983) is still the standard reference for all herpetologists in the region. Tweedie was also the first to discover the nesting grounds of the largest chelonian alive today, the leathery turtle *Dermodelia coriacea* (Linnaeus, 1767), in the state of Terengganu, Malaysia (Tweedie, 1953b).

In his long career, Tweedie published over 120 papers, articles and books on various aspects of regional zoology. Many of his publications are light-hearted general articles intended to popularise the study and appreciation of natural history. In no small way, this has helped to increase local interest in the study of zoology. Tweedie recognised early (no doubt partly prompted by the fact that one of the goals of the Raffles Museum was education) that professional zoologists also have a responsibility to inform lay-people as to what is happening in scientific circles. While the writing of popular articles has no "serious scientific merit", its value in education and impact on the public is far greater than any detailed and carefully conceived technical study.

Contrary to the general practices at the time, Tweedie also ensured that paratypes and a good series of all his specimens of the species collected were retained in the Raffles Museum for future workers, and not mostly sent to overseas institutions. It is largely due to Tweedie and his efforts that the museum (now reconstituted as the Zoological Reference Collection under the Department of Zoology, National University of Singapore) (see Yang, 1990; Anon, 1987) now has finest decapod crustacean collection in Southeast Asia, and one of the most representative collections of Southeast Asian Brachyura and Stomatopoda in the world (see Yang, 1979). Tweedie’s collections of decapod crustaceans form the foundation on which much of the present studies of the Malaysian and Southeast Asian Brachyuran fauna are now been made. So many labels in the museum still bear Tweedie’s acronym (MWFT), which in his characteristic scribble reads as "MUFT".

Of all the groups Tweedie studied in depth (most notably the reptiles and fishes), crabs have always been Tweedie’s first love, and he made this obvious in all his works and through our conversations. The complex behaviour of the ocypodids in particular interested him, and between 1950 and 1963, he devoted several papers to this topic. Tweedie was also one of the first workers to highlight the striking diversity of the crab fauna in Malayan and Bornean