

## **PROFESSOR ENSERMU KELBESSA**

14 April 1952–14 August 2016



Professor Ensermu Kelbessa was born on April 14, 1952 to Mrs. Ayiti Heno and Mr. Kelbessa Worati in the Oromia Regional State, West Shewa Zone, Ginchi Woreda in Ado Kebele, Ethiopia. He attended Chacha Elementary School (grades 1–6) and Ambo Hagere Hiwot High School (Grades 7–11) and completed Grade 12 in Addis Ababa University's Leuel Beede Mariam Laboratory School in 1972.

Professor Ensermu Kelbessa obtained a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology, Addis Ababa University in 1978, a Master of Science degree in Botany, Addis Ababa University in 1982 and PhD degree in Systematic Botany (Taxonomy), Department of Systematic Botany, Uppsala University, Sweden in 1990.

Although still very young, Professor Ensermu Kelbessa joined the Addis Ababa University's Biology Department as a graduate assistant in 1979. He then went on to serve the university in various positions including: Lecturer, Assistant Professor, Associate Professor and, finally, Full Professor in 2009. Over the course of 37 work service years (1979–2016), Prof. Ensermu played a crucial role in teaching, research, and coordination of various departmental activities, including team leadership, serving as principal investigator for several research projects, as well as non-academic service projects. In recent years he oversaw the establishment of the new "Department of Plant Biology and Biodiversity Management". In acknowledgment of his extensive contributions, Addis Ababa University awarded him the annual Distinguished Teaching Service Award in 2015. The German Embassy similarly awarded him for his contributions to plant science. Professor Ensermu Kelbessa participated in numerous research projects and was renowned for the immensity and success of his efforts. Chief among these, he was a lifelong expert on Ethiopian botany, particularly the plant family Acanthaceae. He co-directed the Ethiopian Flora Project, which culminated in the very significant work, *Flora of Ethiopia and Eritrea*. Prof. Ensermu published more than 100 articles, solo or co-authored, and contributed numerous peer reviews on an annual basis. He edited and reviewed many books, advised numerous graduate students, and his works can be found across various parts of his own university and worldwide.

He visited and established contacts with institutions in many countries including Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Austria, Netherlands, Belgium, France, Romania, Greece, Spain, Italy, United Kingdom, Ireland, Kenya, Djibouti, Somalia, Cameroon, Malawi, Tanzania, South

Africa, Madagascar and the USA. Among the institutions most visited by Prof. Ensermu was the Herbarium of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, where he spent a long period of time (at intervals) during his work on the Flora of Ethiopia.

Professor Ensermu Kelbessa was a member of the Biological Society of Ethiopia, the International Association of Plant Taxonomy, the IUCN Species Survival Commission, the East African Plants Red List Authority, the Ethiopian Academy of Sciences, the Coffee Forum and the Ethiopian Forum for Environment. He was very engaged in public service and outreach and gave numerous interviews on television and radio. Ensermu was also very active in the Association for the Taxonomic Study of the Flora of Tropical Africa (AETFAT) and co-organised its 17<sup>th</sup> Conference in Addis in September 2003. During this conference the African Plants Initiative (API) was conceptualised, which resulted in an international collaborative partnership that produced an online database of scholarly information about African plants, including all the types. This initiative turned out to be so valuable and successful that it was rolled out worldwide and is now known as JSTOR Global Plants.

In addition to teaching and advising more than 17 PhD students, Prof. Ensermu co-led two projects: Regional Capacity Building for Sustainable Natural Resources Management and Agricultural Productivity under Changing Climate (CAPSNAC) (with Norway) and the Bale Mountain Project (with the University of Marburg, Germany), as well as the Addis Ababa Rivers Development and the Addis Ababa University Thematic Project.

Professor Ensermu suffered a stroke and passed away on the 14th of August, 2016. He is survived by his wife Mrs. Bizunesh Daba as well as two daughters (Keneni Ensermu and Hacahltu Ensermu), one son (Lelisa Ensermu), and four grandchildren.

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*Obituary compiled by Prof. Sebsebe Demissew with input from members of the Department of Plant Biology and Biodiversity Management, College of Natural Sciences, Addis Ababa University and Erin Tripp, University of Colorado.*

*List of publications compiled by Sebsebe Demissew and Benny Bytebier*

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