

**AFRICA LOSES AN EXCELLENT BOTANIST AND TEACHER,
PROFESSOR BRIAN HARRIS**

27 August 1929–20 April 2017

On 20 April 2017 in Edinburgh, Scotland, Africa lost one of its foremost botanists and University teachers of botany after a brief illness. Brian James Harris was born on 27 August 1929 in Neath, South Wales. By 1949 he had obtained his BSc in Agricultural Botany from the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth and in 1953, he earned a PhD from the University of Wales. Soon after obtaining his PhD, he was appointed as a Lecturer in the Botany Department of the University of Ghana (at the time the University College of the Gold Coast.) and continued in that post until 1965. From 1965 he was appointed Reader in Botany and Head of Department, University of Dar es Salaam.

Brian developed an interest in field courses for students, and was a firm believer in the importance of students knowing how to identify plants and how to prepare and use herbarium specimens for research.



Prof. B.J. Harris with University of Dar es Salaam students on annual field course, Serengeti National Park, in the early 1970s.

Among his many accomplishments, Brian initiated the formation of the University of Dar es Salaam Herbarium (DSM). Because of his experience elsewhere, he not only made certain

that adequate space was provided, but also had the wisdom to see that there were establishment posts for both academic and technical members of the herbarium staff.

Brian was a consummate field biologist and collector. In Tanzania, his collections are mostly from T2, T3 and T6 (regions of the Flora of Tropical East Africa) made between 1965 and 1970. He also collected on the Kitulo Plateau in T7 (southern Tanzania) in September of 1968, in an area now part of Kitulo National Park. His work in West Africa on pollination of *Kigelia* and *Parkia* trees by bats is recognized as groundbreaking (Baker and Harris 1957; Harris and Baker, 1958). Brian was an accomplished photographer, and these publications were illustrated with pictures of bats landing on moving pendulous inflorescences in the dark. He was always ready for a field trip, and attended field courses with students to the areas around Morogoro, Tanga, and Serengeti. In Tanzania, his series of collection field numbers begins in 1965 and includes some 6500 specimens, mostly deposited in the University of Dar es Salaam Herbarium, with duplicates placed in herbaria elsewhere. Brian and his wife Sine, also a botanist (died 6 April 2005), in addition to teaching and supporting undergraduates and postgraduates at the university, also welcomed many visiting botanists from around the world at their home on the campus.

In addition to his duties at the University in Dar, he was an active member of the University of Dar es Salaam Grounds Committee and Brian also served as external examiner from 1967 to 1972 to the College of African Wildlife Management, Mweka. Brian was a good judge of the botanic interest and ability of individuals. R.C. Wingfield, who worked in the Herbarium from about 1969 – 1972, produced, with no grant funding, several useful publications (see Polhill & Polhill, 2015) and the only plant list and key for the campus. Mr. Leonard Mwasumbi, also employed in the Herbarium during Harris's time, conducted many useful biodiversity surveys, participated as a botanist in Environmental Assessments in Tanzania and helped author a guide to Tanzanian mushrooms (see Polhill and Polhill, 2015).

In 1973 Brian left the Dept. of Botany at the University of Dar es Salaam to become Professor of Botany at Ahmadu Bello University in northern Nigeria, where he taught for 17 years until he and Sine retired to Edinburgh, Scotland in 1990. In Nigeria a heavy teaching and administrative load reduced his amount of research and field work. In his retirement he was an active plant and environmental conservationist locally while still maintaining an interest in African botany.

Eponymy

Combretum harrisii Wickens, *Kew Bull.* **31**(1): 154 (1976), Combretaceae.

Cololejeunea harrisii Pocs, *Acta Bot. Acad. Sci. Hung.* **21**: 357. f. 23–34 (1975), Lejeuneaceae.

Phyllanthus harrisii Radcl.-Sm., *Kew Bull.* **35**: 768 (1981), Euphorbiaceae.

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Obituary compiled by Prof. Kim M. Howell, P.O. Box 35197, Dar es Salaam.