

Introduction of Sri Lankan Biota to the Western World
By the Portuguese

Dhanesh Wisumperuma¹ and W. L. D. P. T. S. de A. Goonatilake²

Sri Lanka is a tropical island of the Indian Ocean, and lying midway on the sea route between east and west. Its unique geo-climatic features support rich biological diversity. These resources are still being described scientifically and new discoveries of flora and fauna are still occasionally published. These wealthy biological resources received the attention of travelers, explorers, scholars, religious dignitaries, royalty and pirates from other parts of the world who came across the country since the ancient times. These observations were recorded and a considerable number of such accounts still exist.

In this paper we have considered the accounts in the published literature which were compiled during the Portuguese occupation during the 16th – 17th centuries. The accounts of these literatures are general descriptions or scientific accounts. However, the present binominal scientific nomenclature by Carl Linnaeus appeared in 1750s, after the period of our concern. Therefore, we have compared these descriptions with present known biological taxa and have made an attempt to identify each species exactly. The accuracy, reliability and the validity of the descriptions of these accounts are also evaluated. The paper also analyzes the scientific nature and the contribution to the world of science of these descriptions, as among pioneering descriptive accounts of our biodiversity, which opened up the enormous biological resources of this island to the western world.

Key Words: Sri Lanka; Western World; Portuguese; Biological resources

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