

## ACHARIUS MEDAL TO KANSRI BOONPRAGOB

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to the nomination committee for awarding the Acharius Medal to a truly exceptional individual whose accomplishments are as remarkable as they are inspiring. Today, we honor a colleague who has dedicated nearly four decades to building a thriving community of lichenologists in a country where, when she began her journey, this field of study was virtually nonexistent. This achievement is particularly significant because it has taken place in a tropical country, where the biodiversity of lichens is vast yet was largely unexplored. Her strategic focus on fostering international collaborations and investing in the education and training of young scientists has proven to be an extraordinarily successful approach.

I am honored to speak about my esteemed colleague and dear friend Kansri Boonpragob, emeritus professor at Ramkhamhaeng University in Bangkok.

I speak on behalf of many colleagues, including our Thai colleagues Kawinnat Buaruang, Khwanyuruan Naksuwankul, Ekaphan Kraichak, and Sittiporn Parnmen who were unable to attend this conference. However, I am extremely happy that Kansri is here with us tonight.



The award ceremony at IMC12 (Photo: Lucia Muggia)

Kansri's career began in botany and vegetation studies. After earning her Bachelor's degree from Kasetsart University in Bangkok, she pursued her Master's thesis in Tennessee and later obtained a diploma in environmental management and protection at the Technical University in Dresden. Her journey into the world of lichenology began when she completed her Ph.D. at Arizona State University under the mentorship of Tom Nash, focusing on the ecophysiology and impact of air pollution on lichens, particularly *Ramalina menziesii*, in California in 1987. Afterward, she returned to Thailand and established a lichen research group at Ramkhamhaeng University in Bangkok. There, she continued her work on ecophysiology and air pollution and initiated pioneering research on climate change. Her contribution to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was instrumental, and as part of the IPCC, she was among those honored with the Nobel Peace Prize in 2007—a truly remarkable achievement. The IPCC reports, to which she contributed, have been pivotal in shaping global policies aimed at mitigating the effects of climate change.

Realizing that the taxonomy of lichens in Thailand was underdeveloped, Kansri devoted herself to overseeing and supporting numerous projects and training students to address this gap. At a time when the diversity of tropical lichens was poorly understood globally, her efforts were both timely and transformative. She initiated collaborations with prominent international lichenologists, including Jack Elix, David Hawksworth, Klaus Kalb, Robert Lücking, Pier Luigi Nimis, Phillip Rundell, and the late Ming-you Lai, among others. Kansri also encouraged her students to attend international conferences and visit laboratories in Europe and North America to gain experience and build networks. Furthermore, she organized international meetings, such as the Thelotremataceae workshop in 2008 and the IAL7 congress in 2012. Her meticulous organization of these meetings, including preparing her students through English language training, ensured their success. This strategy paid off handsomely—a Thai lichen checklist published seven years ago included contributions from 21 Thai lichenologists, out of a total of 25 authors. This publication more than doubled the number of lichen species known from Thailand compared to a catalog published only 15 years earlier, reflecting nearly a century of lichen research in the country. The momentum she created has not waned; the number of known species has since increased by over 100.

In addition to being an inspiration and supporter of her students and colleagues and their students, Kansri is a most generous host, offering her guest condos to visitors and providing more food than anyone could ever consume – in addition to inviting them for lunch and dinner every day. Those who attended the IAL7 congress will fondly remember her favorite lakeside restaurant outside of Bangkok close to her home, where she loves to entertain her guests.

Kansri's career in lichenology spans over 40 years, but her intellectual curiosity has always extended far beyond lichens alone. Her publication record is extensive, including more than 50 scientific journal articles, several books, and numerous introductory articles on lichens, ecology, and botany written in Thai.

We are incredibly fortunate to have Kansri Boonpragob as our mentor, colleague, and collaborator. Her enthusiasm, generosity, and unwavering determination are unparalleled, and we will continue to seek her wisdom and guidance as she continues to be an active and engaged professor emeritus.

Congratulations, Kansri, on this well-deserved recognition!



Kansri Boonpragob and Thorsten Lumbsch presenting Acharius medal (*Photo: Robert Lücking*)

*Thorsten Lumbsch*