

SHORT NOTES

Lim Boo Liat and Batu Caves

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I first met the late Dr. Lim Boo Liat in the year 2000. He cut quite a figure with his signature pipe in hand and a notebook bulging out of his breast pocket. At that time I was involved in a project on the management of the Krau Wildlife Reserve and I was struck with the respect and affection that Dr. Lim received from the project and wildlife department staff.

Several years later, Dr Lim kindly agreed to let me interview him in his home. I was carrying out research on the rare trapdoor spiders of Batu Caves (Lim *et al.* 2009). Dr. Lim explained the methods he used when he first studied the spiders in the Dark Cave at Batu Caves from 1959 to 1961. Over a 14-month period, he visited the Dark Cave every week and recorded detailed observations on the spiders and other fauna. His findings remain the most in-depth assessment of the Dark Cave's invertebrates (McClure *et al.* 1967). Longitudinal studies are rare in the tropics and so I felt privileged to hear how he counted the spider nests and measured their size – half a century prior.

Dr Lim carried with him a wealth of such invaluable knowledge and experience. My story is not unique, he routinely shared his insights with many other young naturalists. Sadly, his sharing came to an end with his passing in July 2020. That said, his memory will continue to inspire and his many publications will continue to have an impact. In particular, Dr. Lim's paper on the Dark Cave helped the 1981 campaign that stopped the quarrying of the hill.

As a happy coda, I recently found a documentary of a young Dr. Lim at work in Batu Caves. The film, 'Batu Caves', was produced in 1960 by the Malayan Film Unit. A digitised version was released by the Malaysian Film Development Board in November 2020. The film features a thirty-something Dr. Lim touring the Dark Cave with six Girl Guides. The footage includes close-ups of the trapdoor spiders and other animals (figures, below). The videography was exceptional for its time and won several international awards. The film closes with a narrative that perhaps set the stage for Dr. Lim's many decades of contribution to the natural sciences: "What thrills and adventure are in store for those who will venture into this new world of a million yesterdays? To discover not only sport and diversion, but the mysteries of a new country, vital and alive, within this world of darkness."



Figure Captions

Top: Lim Boo Liat turning over a stone in a guano pit of the Dark Cave, Batu Caves (Malayan Film Unit, 1960). **Middle, left:** a colony of cave cockroaches (*Pycnoscelus striatus*); **centre:** adult cave roach; **right:** trapdoor spider (*Liphistius batuensis*) at entrance of nest. **Bottom:** Lim Boo Liat illuminating a wall of the cave (possibly showing a trapdoor spider nest).

REFERENCES

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Available online: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DS6GfsLuNkw>>.
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