

OBITUARY



YASUHIRO ASAHINA
1881–1975

Dr Yasuhiko Asahina, Professor Emeritus of the University of Tokyo, passed away on 30 June 1975. He was an honorary member of the British Lichen Society and one of the most outstanding lichenologists in the world.

Dr Asahina was born on 16 April 1881 and graduated from the University of Tokyo in 1905. Although primarily a specialist in the chemistry of natural products of plants and pharmaceutical sciences, he devoted the latter half of his life to the study of lichens. When he started studying lichens, probably in about 1921, he was apparently mainly interested in the chemistry of lichen products. However, he obviously encountered great difficulties in identifying the lichens which he wanted to investigate chemically as Mr A. Yasuda (1868–1924) was then the only lichenologist in Japan. Consequently he probably started to study lichen taxonomy out of sheer necessity. In taxonomic studies of plants, especially of lichens, however, he seemed to be in his true element and had been interested in various plant and animal groups since his student days. In this respect, he was an unusual amateur naturalist, who later became an outstanding professional taxonomist.

As is well-known, he introduced *p*-phenylendiamine as a reagent for colour testing of lichen thalli and discovered the microcrystal method for the qualitative analysis of lichen substances. These techniques are at present widely employed by lichenologists throughout the world. Particularly by using his microcrystal method, Asahina made distinguished contributions to the taxonomy of the difficult genus *Cladonia*. He also studied many other genera in Japan of which *Alectoria*, *Anzia*, *Cetraria*, *Lobaria*, *Parmelia*, *Ramalina* and *Usnea* merit particular mention. Most lichenologists would perhaps be amazed to know how accurate his species concept was and how cautiously he treated taxa, even though he described many as new. As evidenced in the classic *Chemistry of Lichen Substances* (Y. Asahina & S. Shibata 1954), on the other hand, the chemical structure of more than 100 lichen products was investigated by Asahina and his pupils. He apparently started a new era in lichenology, that of lichen chemotaxonomy. In addition, his frank and warmhearted personality was respected by all his friends and students and he will be sorely missed. I believe that he will always be regarded as one of the greatest men in the history of lichenology.

Syo Kurokawa