

**“The world needs more taxonomists to describe the immense biodiversity”:
says Dr. P. T. Cherian, the winner of Janaki Ammal National Award for
Animal Taxonomy-2017**



Dr. P.T. Cherian (Former Addl. Director of Zoological Survey of India), was awarded the prestigious E. K. Janaki Ammal award on Animal Taxonomy- 2017, in honour of his outstanding contributions in the field. The award was presented by Dr. Harsvardhan, the Union Minister of Science and Technology, Earth Sciences, Environment, Forests and Climate Change, at New Delhi, on the eve of the World Environment Day- 2018. The National Award carries a cash prize of Rs. 5 lakhs, a scroll and a medallion.

Born on 19th October, 1942 in Thumpamon village, Pathanamthitta District, Kerala, Dr. Cheriyan had a keen desire to learn about nature from his childhood itself and has been a meritorious student throughout. He did his post graduation in Zoology from St. John's College, Agra and on receiving a Senior Research Fellowship of the Ministry of Education, Govt. of India in 1966, he joined research in the school of Entomology of the same college, under the renowned Indian Entomologist Prof. Dr. M.S. Mani.

Dr. Cherian joined the Z.S.I., as a class 1 officer in 1972 and served as officer-in-charge of different stations of the Z.S.I. He retired as the Senior most Additional Director in charge of 8 of the 16 Regional Centres of the Z.S.I. in 2002. Since then he has been working as Emeritus Scientist in the Zoology Department of the University of Kerala.

He contributed to science, 700 new species, 20 new genera and a new tribe in the Dipteran family Chloropidae. Besides, he also revised many of the tribes and genera of the family on a global basis. The taxonomic classifications he devised, is followed the world over, even today. More than 90% of his publications are single author papers which number more than 175. He also published a Fauna volume dealing with two of the subfamilies of the family. He had also specialized in assessing and reporting on anticipated ecological impacts of proposed hydel, industrial and atomic projects and personally visited and submitted reports on 75 of the proposed projects to the Govt. of India. From time to time for several years, he was a member of the Programme advisory committee for animal sciences- DST, Member- Expert group for the ecodevelopment of Eastern and Western Ghats, MOEn, Member -Monitoring Committee Centre for Ecological Sciences, Indian Institute of Science, Banglore, Expert of the U.P.S.C., Chief Editor of an Indian Entomological journal. He was also on the Editorial boards of several Indian and Foreign journals. While serving in the Kerala University he taught M.Phil and M.Sc. students and trained researchers and college lecturers in taxonomy and guided research of several Ph.D researchers on Dipteran and other families of insects and fishes.

He reminds the scientific fraternity that hardly 12% of the fauna, especially of lower forms of life have been named till date and the biology of 99% of insects so far named remain unknown. There are more than 3 billion specimens in the various depositories of the world, the majority are unidentified, mostly representing new species. The task is great, the challenge facing the taxonomists is enormous. He raised concern that hardly a few youngsters take up conventional taxonomic studies, these days.

He has visited several international institutions and museums abroad. He recollects that during one of such visits to the prestigious Smithsonian Institution, Washington, USA, inspite of the day being a holiday, the institute was kept open, the senior authorities were present to welcome him, and he was provided with all facilities to work- a glaring example that the work he had turned out in a corner of the world was being appreciated at large in another corner.

His wife Mira Cherian has been a member of the teaching staff of some colleges and an Indian University. He has two daughters- Shirin after her postgraduation from Columbia University is working and settled with family in New Jersey and Sharon who after her M.S. from New York is working in Mumbai.