

Vernon H. Heywood

**João Manuel António Paes do Amaral Franco**  
**(25 June 1921 – 8 May 2009)**



João Manuel António Paes do Amaral Franco  
(Photo by Miguel Pinto da Silva Menezes de Sequeira).

The death of Professor João do Amaral Franco at the age of 89 is a tragic loss for Portuguese botany and will be lamented by friends and colleagues throughout Europe and the Mediterranean.

Professor Amaral Franco can be described as the patriarch of Portuguese botany. A student of Professor João Carvalho e Vasconcelos (1897–1972) and partly contemporaneous with Professor Antonio Xavier Pereira Coutinho (1851–1939), he represented the end of a line of eminent botanists that lasted over a century. His professional life was intimately linked with the Instituto Superior de Agronomia of Lisbon where he served throughout his long and illustrious career. He trained there as an agronomist (Engenheiro Agrónomico) and was appointed a second assistant in 1945, later to be in charge of botanical studies from 1950 until his retirement in 1991, initially as an Aggregate Professor until 1967 when he was nominated Extraordinary Professor

and in the 1980s Full Professor (professor Catedrático). He trained and influenced generations of agronomists and foresters.

His botanical research started in the 1940s when he was still a student. He showed an aptitude for plant taxonomy, and was initially interested especially in conifers and published a series of papers, the first of them in 1940, on Araucariaceae, *Picea*, *Sequoia*, *Chamarcyparis*, amongst others and in 1943 published his 244 page *Dendrologia Florestal*, still cited today as a major reference work on the trees of Portugal. His interest in conifers and tree taxonomy and silviculture continued throughout his life and extended to other parts of the world such as the Himalayas, Nepal and China, publishing an extensive series of papers on diverse genera. He later extended his interests in tree taxonomy to various angiosperm groups such as *Quercus* and *Salix*.

From 1947 to 1952 Amaral Franco made regular visits to the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew and the Natural History Museum in London and was fluent in English. He was very much open to international initiatives, even during a period when this was unusual for Portuguese (and Spanish) scientists. He was a strong supporter of *Flora Europaea*, writing accounts of several genera in volume 1 and later volumes and when invited to become a Regional Adviser for Portugal, he accepted with alacrity and dedicated himself with great enthusiasm to reviewing the draft accounts to which he contributed many valuable comments. He published a series of papers in the *Flora Europaeae Notulae Systematicae* published in *Feddes Repertorium*. In this work on *Flora Europaea* he collaborated with the agronomist and distinguished taxonomist António Rodrigo Pinto da Silva who was also a Regional Adviser of *Flora Europaea*. He also participated actively in the work of the *Atlas Florae Europaeae*. From 1965, he began a long-standing and close collaboration with Dr Maria da Luz Rocha Afonso who also assisted him in his work as a Regional Adviser for *Flora Europaea*. Later, Professor Amaral Franco also contributed to the *Flora Iberica* project and to *Med-Checklist*.

Following a suggestion I made to him in 1968, he started preparation of a Portuguese translation of the text of the first two volumes of *Flora Europaea* as far as the species occurring in Portugal were concerned. This was published as the *Nova Flora de Portugal* volume 1 in 1971 followed by volume 2 in 1984, corresponding to volumes 3 and 4 of *Flora Europaea* and (in collaboration with Dr Rocha Afonso) volume 3 part 1 in 1994, part 2 in 1998, and part 3 in 2003. This was not just a simple translation and adaptation of *Flora Europaea* for Portugal but contained a considerable amount of new material and revision to bring it up to date. The *Nova Flora* remains the standard reference work for the Portuguese flora.

He was essentially an outstanding classical taxonomist whose work was based on extensive field collecting, detailed herbarium studies and a deep knowledge of the literature. A botanical scholar, he insisted on the highest standards both in his own work and that of his students and wielded a fierce editorial pen.

In addition to his extensive taxonomic work, he published a considerable number of biogeographical, phytogeographical and chorological studies<sup>1</sup>.

After his retirement in 1991 he continued his taxonomic and phytogeographical work and published an impressive number of important books and papers. He contributed to the revision of *Flora Europaea* volume 1 and also prepared a revised edition of volume 1 of the *Nova Flora de Portugal* and was working on the revision of later volumes until shortly before his death. João do Amaral Franco was a man of great personal charm and a most generous host and I still recall some of the memorable meals I shared with him on various visits to Portugal. Having known him as a friend and colleague for over 50 years, I feel a deep sense of loss. He died in the year 2009 which also saw the loss of Professor César Gómez Campo and Professor Santiago Castroviejo – a sad year indeed for Iberian botany.

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed account of his achievements and publications, consult Miguel Menezes de Sequeira, Os herbários e a obra do taxonomista João do Amaral Franco, *Boletim de la AIHM* 8-9: 31–47 (2007).