



# THE INTERNATIONAL PALM SOCIETY

April 2020

NEWSLETTER

This edition of the International Palm Society newsletter highlights part two of our look at the South-west American desert and the indigenous *Washingtonia filifera*. I am grateful to Andrew Street, assistant curator of palms at the Montgomery Botanical Center, Miami, Florida, for contributing this essay. In addition, we shine the spotlight on PalmTalk with forum moderator Dean Ouer.

## Palms in Habitat – *Washingtonia filifera* in Arizona by Andrew Street

Before this year, I had never been to the desert. Being a palm guy, I eagerly said yes to a trip with Larry Noblick to see our native *Washingtonia filifera* in its desert habitat. I was also interested to see what the desert was all about. Besides a few cliché assumptions about deserts, I had no idea what to expect.

Of the three collection locations, Castle Hot Springs, Arizona was our last stop. We headed out early on a cold morning. It's about 40 miles from Phoenix with the last seven or so being unpaved. I couldn't help but take in the cleanliness of the desert; with so little water, there are no weeds to speak of – replaced by a menagerie of different types of stones and rocks that blended together to form a unique reddish color. One could spend all day enjoying the strangely organic shapes of rocky outcrops and have as much fun combing the riverbeds for different rocks as you would shell-hunting on the beach. As alluring as these activities are, Larry and I were here to do something even more exciting – visit an actual Palm Oasis!

Saguaro cacti surround the desert site of Castle Hot Springs.



## Palms in Habitat – *Washingtonia filifera* in Arizona – cont'd.

When we got to Castle Hot Springs, we were amazed at what we saw: Beautiful little cabins scattered about in what looked like a tropical resort were it not for all the red mountains and saguaro cacti surrounding us. Great huge *Washingtonia filifera* were lining an opulent driveway to the main buildings. There were water bodies everywhere, along with fruit trees and a large organic greenhouse teeming with edible produce.

We pulled into what looked like an employee parking lot. There were people about, along with large machines working on the gravel roads. We came to meet a man named Kerry, who was a very interesting, original Arizonian. He knew who we were and gave us a little history of the site before we were met by young man in a four-wheel drive vehicle. He introduced himself as Ryan, the property manager, and informed us that it was his job to assist us in any way he could. So, we shook hands and climbed inside.

As we approach the palm oasis, we could see a stand of old palms.



## Palms in Habitat – *Washingtonia filifera* in Arizona – cont'd.

It didn't take us long to explain to him what we were looking for – he knew we were here to study the local palms, but he was not sure where he wanted to start. Larry and I told him we were looking for a population of old palms that undoubtedly were very close to a water source. We then went on to explain we were looking for a group of palms that originated before the Sonoran Desert came to be. This would mean these palms would not have been planted and would be near a permanent water source – the reason they survived desertification of their original habitat. After this set of parameters was illustrated, it was as if a light had turned on in his head; we made a U-turn, as he told us that he knew the place.



It was not long before it was apparent that we were in the right vehicle. I distinctly recall a 10-foot stretch of large rocks that we climbed/straddled in off-road amazement. All told, it was about 7 minutes before we could see some palms in the distance. A couple minutes later and we were getting out of the Polaris onto what was an old dried lakebed.

*Washingtonia filifera* on the edge of an old lakebed.

## Palms in Habitat – *Washingtonia filifera* in Arizona – cont'd.



And there they were. Growing at the edge and slightly up the natural embankment were maybe fifty palms – most with full skirts intact. Just below them and even trickling through the root bases, was warm water, welling up and flowing about a dozen or so feet, before turning into wet sandy gravel. This was exactly what we were looking for, but oddly, more impactful that I had anticipated; the gravity of this unique, antediluvian oasis was beginning to set in.

While collecting our voucher samples, we were greeted by several wild donkeys and an old cow that seemed to be doing very well on her own. While measuring and pressing our material, we all decided to try the ripe fruit. Surprisingly, they were

sweet and slightly addicting. It was no wonder, most of the animal scat we saw was packed with *W. filifera* seeds.

After our collection and measurements, we were treated to an abridged tour of the Castle Hot Springs Resort. In what is certainly one of the most beautiful deserts in the world, we were surrounded by a surreal amount of flowing warm waters of various temps. This has been combined with a tasteful combination of historic preservation and first-class luxury accommodations.

We were offered a chance to eat lunch made by their very own private chef with all organic ingredients grown on site. Sadly, our schedule did not allow for such leisure, and we were already feeling a bit self-conscious of the amazing care we had been gifted. So, we thanked all we could and left to press our specimens. My only regret was that I did not get to stay longer to see the stars at night. It must be one of the most amazing sights one could see.



## PalmTalk by Andy Hurwitz

PalmTalk is the beloved internet-based forum supported by the International Palm Society. IPS member and PalmTalk monitor Dean Ouer explains:

“PalmTalk, in various forms, has been around for about 20 years. The present version, operating non-stop for 15 years, is a modern forum format consisting of almost 15,000 users through the years, almost one million posts, and close to a quarter of a million photos. Unlike FaceBook, there is a powerful Search feature. And searching for any particular palm, person, nursery, weather, growing zone, etc. will always bring results. Ask a question, and you will always receive multiple answers and/or suggestions. In its “pages” you will find entertainment, education, and friends that share the same passion as you. You will meet people to visit during your travels, and those who will wish to visit you. You can share and gain knowledge from them, and many will become good friends.”

IPS member Bill Sanford has been a frequent user since 2005. He reports that PalmTalk is far superior to Facebook, especially when conducting a “deep dive,” given the expertise of the contributors. Bill appreciates the level of detail from the international community, even if only anecdotal, which he finds remarkable. He added, “PalmTalk is second to none when it comes to diagnosing ailing palms. The advice given far surpasses any information one can generally find on health and growing idiosyncrasies down to specific species.” And of course, the pictures are superb.

IPS Member David Bleistein is perhaps the most frequent poster on PalmTalk. He remembers joining all the way back in the late 1990s. He has interacted with thousands of enthusiasts around the world and is particularly fond of the many travel opportunities and private garden invitations afforded him by our PalmTalk community. David has kindly distributed seed throughout the world to hobbyists via PalmTalk. He has sent seeds to Russia, South Korea, the U. K., Poland, Japan and many other countries.

To conclude, in the words of Dean Ouer, “If you are not viewing PalmTalk regularly, you are missing out on one of the most worthwhile benefits the IPS offers the palm world.”

Please join the community. Go to [www.palms.org](http://www.palms.org) and select PalmTalk Forums from the top menu bar.

## Made from Palms

This photo of a carved and painted tagua nut (the seed of *Phytelephas* spp.) comes from Brian Gratwicke, a conservation biologist based in Washington, D.C., USA. The amphibian is the Neotropical toad, *Atelopus glyphus*.

Do you have an artefact made from palms? Share it with the IPS membership. Send a photo and description of the item to Andy Hurwitz, [ashcvs@yahoo.com](mailto:ashcvs@yahoo.com).



**DOES YOUR LOCAL CHAPTER/PALM SOCIETY HAVE AN EVENT? Let us know by advertising it here! Or share your experiences afterwards! Contact us and send us pictures!**

Keep in mind that the IPS also offers merchandise online that can help you show off your membership, present your palm passion, and help spread the word about our community of palm enthusiasts!!

How do you get your own IPS items that include jewelry, shirts, caps, mugs, glasses, and many other practical items? Simply follow the “caps, t-shirt, totes, and more!” link from the IPS homepage [IPS Home](#), or go directly to this link: [IPS CafePress](#).



Remember to support our organization by participating with us! You can contribute by participating in our Palm Talk forum, our Facebook group, or by writing an article for either Palms journal or a note for IPS newsletter. You can also make an extra donation to the International Palm Society.



[www.palms.org](http://www.palms.org)



@InternationalPalmSociety



@IPS\_PalmSociety



@thepalmsociety