

Palm-Collecting Adventures in Asia

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III. Singapore and Taiwan

Our flight from Bali to Singapore on 23 September 1975 touched down briefly in Jakarta, then went on to what may well be one of the world's most bustling small islands. New construction, replacing old dilapidation and for expansion, has taken over but landscaping hasn't been neglected. Many avenues are palm-lined and the landscape is far from barren. We were impressed with what we had seen flying in, and after settling into the Shangri-La Hotel, near Orchard Road and not far from the Singapore Botanic Gardens, we were ready to resume our quest for palms. For some species, such as *Ptychosperma macarthurii*, we only had to explore the hotel's beautifully landscaped grounds. These palms were fruiting, and we were welcomed into the hotel's small nursery which was well stocked with palm seedlings and other plants.

That evening we called Mr. Daren Ng Heow Keng, a member of The Palm Society. We had not previously corresponded with Daren Ng but Eric Taylor, who had accompanied us earlier in Malaysia and previously resided in Singapore, had written him of our plans.

Daren Ng, busy as he is as Managing Director of Dow Flora (Singapore) Pte. Ltd., met us early next morning and drove us to his several establishments in the city and to his 10-acre farm and nursery several miles into the island. Phyllis prevailed on Daren to pose before we left (Fig. 1). His outlets are rife with exotic plants and his outlying

nursery had thousands of palm seedlings under cultivation.

Daren is much devoted to palms and has cultivated some unique specimens, such as the variegated *Licuala grandis* in Figure 2. He also has variegated *Rhapis* species. We couldn't carry back these exotics but his helpfulness will assure acquisition later on.

That evening we joined Daren and friends for good food and entertainment at "Paradise" on Singapore's water front, returning to our lodging via Mt. Faber, where one can see the lights of Singapore, as well as palms, and perhaps lovers, casting shadows.

Next day early we were inside Singapore's well-known botanic gardens. We were delighted to meet there with Miss S. Y. Geh, who has been so helpful in correspondence with Lucita Wait and DeArmand Hull in The Palm Society's Seed Bank activities. Miss Geh kindly supplied us with a map of the gardens though no catalog of plants was available, and we went on to see the palm collection.

The gardens are kept beautifully groomed, so much so that each fallen leaf and seed is methodically swept up and whisked away before the would-be seed collector can recover anything on the ground. Arrangements can be made for obtaining palm seeds, and Miss Geh sent us some cherished ones after we left Singapore, but collecting on the grounds apparently is not encouraged.

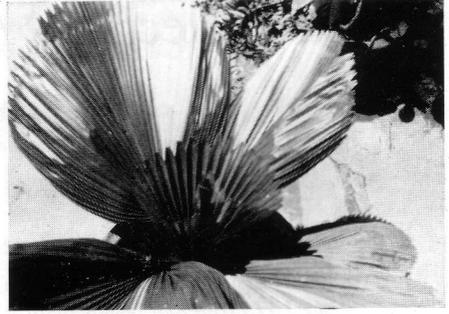
Singapore Botanic Gardens have been noted for an avenue of *Cyrtostachys*, which we admired, and we viewed other



1. Mr. Daren Ng and the author in Singapore.

palms near the herbarium, including *Hyophorbe lagenicaulis*, *Corypha*, and a *Lodoicea maldivica*. Also a *Metroxylon solomonense* had fruited. Farther along we saw a splendid *Bentinckia nicobarica* towering behind *Acoelorrhaphe wrightii*. Then the rains came! We escaped the deluge by ducking into the succulent house where we spent an hour hovering impatiently around the cacti and peering beyond them into the rain-drenched palms outside. This proved to be a mere introduction to the rains that came every day, for we didn't yet know how wet we soon were to be.

Since our earlier failure to collect viable seeds of *Johannesteijsmannia* at Bako National Park in Sarawak, we had looked forward to another attempt in Johore, the southernmost state of West Malaysia. Here the palm is abundant in certain areas which fan out from



2. A variegated *Licuala grandis* in nursery of Dow Flora (Singapore) Pte. Ltd.

Mersing, on the east coast of Johore, 100 miles north of Singapore. To get there one crosses a causeway connecting Singapore with mainland Malaysia, pausing briefly for immigration clearance, then driving through Johore Bahru, past the Sultan's palace, and on.

Daren Ng called for us early morning 26 September, and after a car-servicing pause we headed for Mersing under cloud-laden skies. The road led through rubber and oil palm plantations that often extended for several miles. Interestingly enough, we observed frequently that oil palm (*Elaeis guineensis*) seedlings had been planted between the neat, straight rows of producing rubber trees. We were told that this is a trend, that oil palms are becoming more profitable than rubber trees.



3. Countless leaves of *Johannesteijsmannia altifrons* completely cover this structure in jungle near Mersing, Johore, W. Malaysia.



4. Phyllis and *Johannesteijsmannia* in the rain-drenched jungle near Mersing.

The clouds still threatened when we arrived at a rest stop midway to Mersing, where we refreshed ourselves with, of all unexpected things, a chocolate milkshake. After more than a month in Southeast Asia we hadn't previously encountered this state-side item. While the stop was brief, it was also a rendezvous with Mrs. Ah Boon, a friend of Daren Ng, who accompanied us on to Mersing and guided us into an area abounding with *Johannesteijsmannia altifrons*.

We tarried briefly in Mersing, then drove west a short distance, then left off the main highway on a logging road that had been cut into the jungle. The loggers built a good firm road which we pursued for perhaps five miles before encountering bad ruts and obstructions. No sign of the "Joey" palm yet. Then we angled off, still driving on what looked like a promising fork in the road. It was soon blocked by fallen trees and debris. Backtracking, we went on to a small clearing in the forest where we found the clue that assures the proximity of *Johannesteijsmannia*. It was a large shed, presumably erected for earlier logging operations, as we had seen no one nor any



5. *Areca aliceae*, Singapore Botanic Gardens.

signs of habitation. The shed was completely thatched with hundreds of the palm's diamond-shaped leaves (Fig. 3).

Driving on, perhaps a half mile, we began to see the palms. We abandoned the car about the same time the clouds decided to let loose and started into the bush in a drenching rain. The farther we went the more "Joeys" we found, both on the slopes and in ravines. Rain fell harder and wetter as we searched for seeds without much success. Nevertheless, the palms were a beautiful sight (Fig. 4). After an hour of probing we were thoroughly soaked, muddy, a bit exasperated, yet undaunted. The result was just slightly better than nil;



6. Palms along the walk in Taipei Garden.



7. Palms distract attention from beautiful lily pond in Taipei Garden.

a few immature fruit stalks and small seedlings.

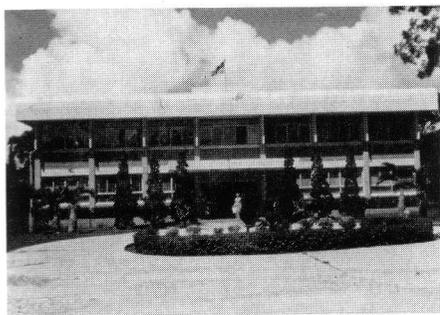
Our considered judgment at this stage was, and still is, that (1) Palm Society members who want this palm will have to have patience because it is unlikely that substantial quantities of seed can be obtained for distribution, and (2) members who venture to collect it might be more successful in January or February—but viable seeds are a will-o-the-wisp.

We headed back to Singapore, pausing again at the midway rest stop, where in soaked attire we indulged in hot tea, then on with one of Daren Ng's staff assistants at the wheel, while Daren stayed overnight in the area to assemble some plants for his nurseries. Darkness as well as the rains accompanied us back to the Shangri-La and we wondered what crossed the desk clerk's mind as we sloshed across the immaculate lobby to the elevator in our bedraggled garb.

Next day we returned to Singapore

Botanic Gardens, pausing on the way to mail an accumulation of seeds. But the rains arrived when we did and after more than an hour under a shelter we gave up and cabbled to the Tiger Balm House of Jade for a brief view of the relics, hence on down Orchard Road for a look at some of Singapore's shopping attractions.

Back to the gardens next morning, the rains held off despite threatening skies so we were able to finish our exploration there. Although it isn't easy to select one's favorite palm in large botanic gardens, we usually do it and here we admired *Areca aliceae*. This clustering small palm, with beautiful red fruits, is a fine ornamental (Fig. 5). Not far away was a splendid *Arenga undulatifolia*, and our interest was aroused by an *Elaeis guineensis* var. *idolatrix*. Near the main entrance, along the outer boundary of the gardens, was a fine



8. Headquarters, Kenting Tropical Botanic Garden, Taiwan.

stand of *Actinorhytis calapparia* which we had collected earlier at Sibolangit in Sumatra. Some of these tall, slender-trunked palms rose out of the ground within two to four feet of each other, an effect we thought of experimenting with back in Jamaica. And the gardens have the magnificent *Rhopaloblaste ceramica* (see *Principes* 14: 73; also, *Principes* 9: 103–107 for more on the gardens).

The same day, our last in Singapore, we cabbed to Elizabeth Walk and the reconstructed areas of the water front, dropping in on the renowned old Raffles Hotel to admire its palm court and relax with a Singapore sling, skillfully concocted at the Raffles' famed long bar. Daren Ng rejoined us at our hotel that evening for farewells, bringing along some coveted seeds, such as durian, which we hope to establish in Jamaica. Again we were indebted to a member of The Palm Society who had been so very helpful.

We boarded China Airline's early flight on 29 September for Taipei, via Hong Kong—the final leg of our quest. Despite a language problem our metered-taxi driver soon delivered us to the Grand Hotel, the new edition of which looks down on the Tamsui River and dominates the Taipei skyline. We arrived in Taipei with no prior palm-collecting arrangements, although Daren Ng had



9. Part of Kenting Garden's fine collection of *Archontophoenix alexandrae*.

written a preceding note from Singapore and we were armed with The Palm Society's latest roster of membership in Taiwan.

After a brief and futile struggle next morning with Taipei's copious telephone directory, in Chinese, we asked the multilingual desk clerk to write a note in Chinese directing a driver to take us to the Taipei Botanical Gardens. The note was effective and we arrived, albeit at the wrong entrance. But we saw palms towering not far away and weren't at all discouraged as we sought out the headquarters of the Taiwan Forestry Research Institute, which has jurisdiction over the garden.

Without prior arrangement, it was no surprise to us that the Director, Mr. Liu, a Palm Society member, was out on a teaching mission at the University. But Mr. Fan-Shi Kung of the office was most considerate and proceeded to furnish us copies of the Taipei garden's plant cata-

log, served tea, and arranged a guide to get us started in the garden. He also introduced us to Mr. Lu, another member of The Palm Society.

The Taipei Botanical Garden dates back to circa 1905. Its genesis was a private Japanese garden started before the turn of the century. The grounds are exceedingly well groomed, easy to get around in, and not vast, being in the heart of the city. It doesn't have a wide collection of palms as major gardens compare but it has some 60 species of mature ones, most of them splendid specimens (see the avenue in Fig. 6). All the plots are enclosed with iron fencing, which sometimes interferes with photography but no doubt protects the plantings. Palms dominate the garden, even drawing away one's attention from such allures as *Victoria* lily pads (Fig. 7). With the Tropic of Cancer bisecting the island, Taipei in the north is subtropical but the typhoon—not cold temperature—is the main weather hazard for palms there.

After exploring the garden, to which we returned later, we checked back at headquarters to be advised that Mr. Ta-Wei Hu, of the research institute and a member of The Palm Society, expected to return from a field trip and join us later in the afternoon at the Taiwan Rose Center, which was on our agenda for the day.

Lest one be misled, we had not at this juncture been converted to roses from devotion to palms. But we wanted to meet Mr. C. S. Chang, President of the Taiwan Horticultural Co. Ltd., and a most congenial member of The Palm Society. Daren Ng had written him from Singapore of our visit to Taiwan, and he most graciously took the time to greet us at his branch center in Taipei, where Mr. Hu joined us, although his main headquarters are 100 miles south in Yuanlin. His enterprise embraces palm

cultivation as well as extensive development and export of roses. We were most grateful for Mr. Chang's courtesies, and left the Rose Center late afternoon hoping that our future paths might cross.

That evening we were guests of friends from the United States who introduced us to the Mongolian barbecue in Taipei. Our reaction, having nothing to do with palm collecting, was that one most assuredly can assemble a great many foods in the raw state and have them integrated into a barbecued entity! One day we enjoyed a visit to the National Palace Museum with its priceless collection of Chinese art treasures. Royal palm specimens stand sentinel at the lower entrance. We explored the friendly and exotic shopping areas in downtown Taipei. One evening Mr. Ta-Wei Hu and his wife joined us for dinner of splendid Cantonese cuisine at Ruby's Restaurant, where we put finishing touches on our trip planned to the southernmost tip of the island.

Taiwan's principal botanic attraction, relatively unpublicized, is the Kenting (Heng Chung) Tropical Botanical Garden, situated on foothills facing the Formosa Strait in the south. Established in 1901, the gardens consist of 45 acres, and forest reserves of 450 acres. To drive there, or go by train from Taipei took more time than we had allowed so we made arrangements to fly as near as possible, Kaohsiung, then arrange taxi accommodation from that airport for the 75 mile drive to the garden.

We had made flight reservations, Mr. Hu had called the gardens regarding our arrival, and we carried several notes written in Chinese. Our plane left Taipei at 7:30 A.M., 2 October for Kaohsiung where the Chinese notes and a helpful China Airline's attendant soon had us in agreement with our taxi driver, who completely devoted himself to us and the day's mission. In fact, before the day

finished our driver not only became an informed admirer of palms but also was addicted to seed collection!

The picturesque drive from Kaohsiung, some of it along interesting coastal areas, and through palm cultivations including stretches of highway lined with coconut palms, and others, terminated at the garden's spacious parking area. It was not far to the garden's headquarters (Fig. 8) which housed laboratory facilities as well as other space for personnel of the Taiwan Forestry Research Institute.

We could see some of the collection of palms as we went through an outer gate toward the headquarters building. We were surprised at the very outset to see *Hyophorbe verschaffeltii* stretching far along a main avenue through the garden. The garden's published plant list designates these trees as *Mascarena verschaffeltii*. Before leaving Kenting we saw more of these palms than we had observed on an earlier visit to Mauritius, the main source of seed of the species.

Entering the headquarters we proffered one of our Chinese introductory notes, and were courteously welcomed and ushered upstairs to a laboratory where we met Mr. Feng-Chi Ho, Forester at the garden. He also is a member of The Palm Society and for some time has been doing research relating to palms. After showing us some of his seed specimens and progress on his current project, he guided us on a tour of the garden's palms. In one area we saw *Corypha*, both *C. umbraculifera* and *C. elata*, planted rather close together on each side of the walk.

Kenting Garden has one of the most beautiful stands of *Archontophoenix alexandrae* we have seen anywhere in cultivation (see Fig. 9). Some of the garden's collection (over 70 mature species) rise up in areas that might be

bushed of undergrowth more frequently, although the tall grass in these places certainly didn't obscure beauty of the palms. The garden is situated on a steep hillside overlooking the sea with splendid vistas. Considerable area is devoted to nurseries, with ample space provided for palm culture.

Sandwiched in with our rather hurried, yet most enjoyable, palm hunt in Kenting Garden was a pause for lunch hosted by Mr. Ho, who certainly made our trip to the garden a memorable event. The garden's environs have a new modern hotel facility, a branch of which is on down the slopes at the beach, so that one with more time at his disposal might well enjoy a longer sojourn at Kenting. The garden deserves much more exploration than we gave it. Our last moments there were devoted to seed collecting, and by that time our very helpful driver from Kaohsiung, lack of English notwithstanding, had committed himself to the search.

Our after-dark return to Taipei ended our palm-collecting agenda in Asia. But our adventures trailed into the next day, part of which involved more packaging and mailing of seeds, a very pleasant exercise with the helpful attendant at the P.O. substation in the recesses of the Grand Hotel, and on into 4 October, the date for our departure home.

Early in the last day Mr. Hu, who had been so helpful to us in Taiwan, picked us up for a scenic drive to Yuashung Park, near Taipei, where we admired ornamental palms and many other landscape treasures. We visited the splendid White Cloud Orchid Farm, with its vast shelters, and were permitted a glimpse inside the laboratories where orchids begin life in a test tube. At the China Pottery Arts Co. works we observed and admired the creativity of young, dedicated artists. Mr. Hu took us to his home

in Taipei for a magnificent luncheon which had been prepared for us by Mrs. Hu.

Time had run out, and we just made our 5:30 P.M. flight on China Airlines which took us back to Los Angeles; hence with a connecting flight to Miami we returned to Montego Bay.

Seeds and letters continue to arrive in Jamaica, and we are replete with fond memories of the Palm Society members and all the helpful people who made our trip successful. We hope, another day, it will be possible to reciprocate their kindnesses when they venture to the welcoming mat in our hemisphere.

PALM QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q. The new leaves appearing on my large royal palm are yellow and gradually turning brown while the old leaves on the plant appear perfectly green. What is wrong with my tree?

A. This past year has seen a heavy infestation of the royal palm bug in the South Florida area. This royal palm bug is known only from Cuba and Florida. It has been collected as far north in Florida as Vero Beach and Bradenton and its range in the state is probably coexistent with the range of the royal palm, which thus far is the only known host of this insect, although other species of royal palms may be affected.

The palm bugs are found primarily on the newly opened leaves of *Roystonea*, doing their greatest damage by feeding on the leaflets that have most recently broken away from the tightly folded emerging leaf. The damage to the leaflet first appears as small yellow spots and as the leaflets become older they gradually turn brown.

The royal palm bug has usually been classified as a minor pest of royal palms, but on occasion high populations can destroy magnificent, mature specimen royals. For some reason high populations developed in 1921, 1957, and 1976. Local park superintendents in the South Florida area have reported that normally the summer rains beginning in May would tend to eliminate the populations

of this insect and thus the need for spraying.

Occasionally it is more economical to replace a specimen than it is to hire the necessary equipment to do the spraying of large specimens. Heavy populations of the insect nevertheless can kill individual mature royal palms.

According to Dr. Don Short, Extension Entomologist, University of Florida, the royal palm bug seriously damaged royal palms in Dade, Broward, Palm Beach, Collier, Lee and Hendry counties during 1975 and 1976. Dr. Jim Reinert, Assistant Professor, Entomology, Agricultural Research Center, Ft. Lauderdale, found severe bronzing of nearly 200 trees examined in the Ft. Lauderdale area.

Dr. Reinert conducted experiments and found one application of two pints 25 percent Meta-Systox-R per 100 gallons of water to be an effective control. It was advised that a spreader-sticker should be added to the insecticide and that the entire canopy and especially the bud must be sprayed.

REFERENCE

- Plant Pathology Circular #46, March 1966,
Florida Department of Agriculture, Division of Plant Industry.

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