

significance; but, everyone interviewed specified a different propitious number of leaves.

Upon reaching the home site, the bundles are opened and the fronds spread and lashed down three or four fronds thick on slender roof beams. Unlike palm roof construction in other parts of the world, pinnae are not woven together or manipulated in any particular way. Fronds are simply piled thick enough to prevent rain from entering while still allowing smoke from cooking fires to filter out from inside the house.

Small groves of *L. piassaba* trees found near houses and villages often have resulted from seeds discarded after preparation of a *refresco* or refreshing drink from the fruits. Flesh of the fruits is thin and removed by soaking and agitating in water. The resulting much-relished liquid bears (with some imagination) "great resemblance to cream both in colour and taste" (Spruce, 1860).

Thus, *L. piassaba* is employed for its fibers, fronds, and its fruits. When a house needs a new roof the residents go into the forest and cut the necessary fronds. Nearly everyone enjoys the drink prepared from *L. piassaba* fruits and participates in its preparation. Fiber cutting on the other hand is a trade

practiced by only a few people. The industry itself has waxed and waned during the last few decades. At present, fiber prices are reasonably good and many people are cutting, but when alternative employment is available fiber cutters readily abandon their trade. This may be due to the hard work and low pay, but no one seems particularly to like cutting fibers no matter what the pay. Fiber cutting is especially avoided during months of high water (July–August) when a greater-than-usual assemblage of terrestrial animals, sometimes dangerous ones, seeks refuge in the fibers. Dangers are real enough and probably underlie myths about *curupira*, the evil spirit inhabiting *L. piassaba* groves (Schultes, 1974). Regardless of the hardships and dangers involved in fiber cutting, the trade lives on wherever this unusual palm grows.

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PALM BRIEFS

Sommieria affinis (Palmae) in Papua New Guinea

Sommieria is a clinostigmatoid genus of three species confined to the western part of New Guinea. Until recently, the genus was not known to occur east of Mamberamo, the type locality for *Sommieria affinis*, in West Irian. In 1975, however, a specimen agreeing with this species was collected at Pagei, in the

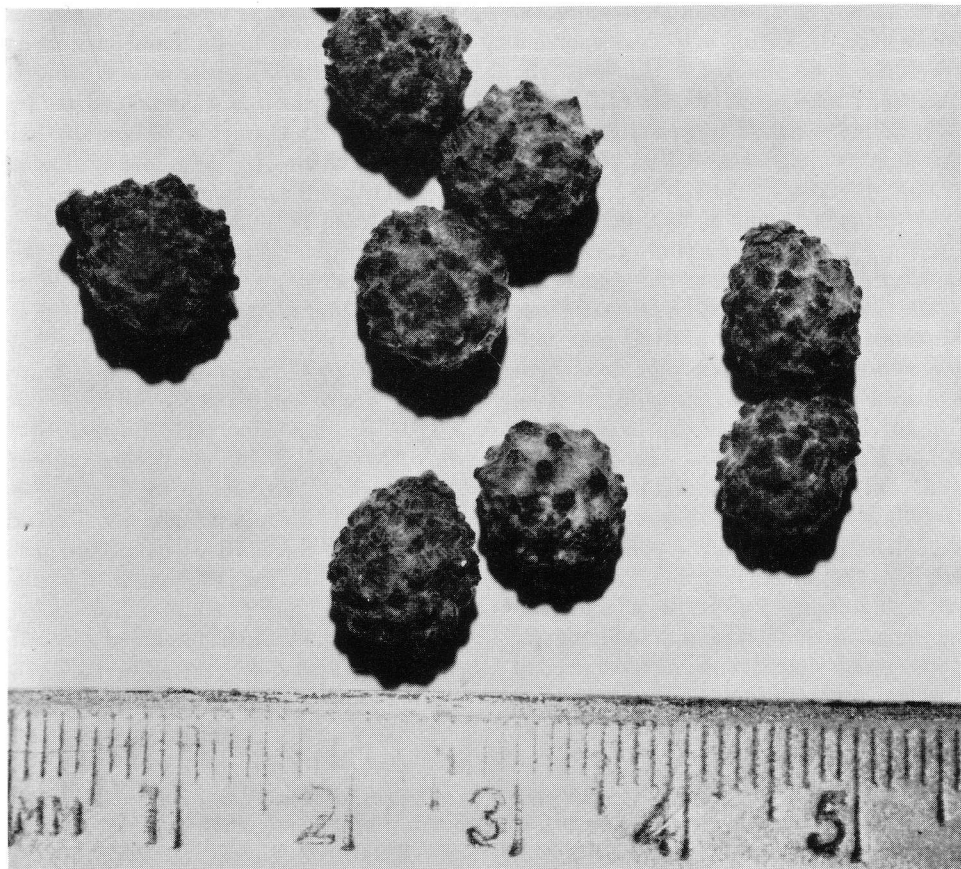
West Sepik District of Papua New Guinea (K. J. White P/1, January 1975, specimen at LAE). This is significant as more than just a range extension. It means that this rare and unusual palm genus is accessible from Papua New Guinea, where botanists can work more freely than they presently can in West Irian. The specimen was marked as voucher for a seed collection, but it is not known whether seedlings have been established anywhere in cultivation.

There is no record of them having been introduced at the Botanic Garden in Lae.

Sommieria affinis resembles a small *Heterospathe*, such as *H. humilis*, except that the fruits are conspicuously warty (Fig. 1), more like those of *Pelagodoxa*. Other features that separate it from *Heterospathe* are a basal stigmatic residue on the fruit (as opposed to a lateral to subapical residue) and homogeneous endosperm. The palm appears to be acaulescent, but this was not certain even to Beccari when he described the species (Bot. Jahrb. Syst. 52: 37. 1914). The peduncle is very long, about seven times

as long as the flowering portion of the inflorescence, which would correlate with an acaulescent habit. Beccari described the leaves as elongate-flabellate (fan-shaped). They are actually pinnately ribbed but undivided except at the apex, as in *Asterogyne*, for example. The tips of the pinnae are toothed or bifid, a feature that distinguishes *Sommieria affinis* from the other two species in the genus.

FREDERICK B. ESSIG
Department of Biology
University of South Florida
Tampa, FL 33620



1. The warty fruits of *Sommieria affinis*, from the specimen collected near Pagei, in the West Sepik District of Papua New Guinea.