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40 Years After Chaos: Guadalcanal Has Beautiful Palms

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Guadalcanal, keystone of the Solomon Islands, a little wisp of land out in the far western Pacific, became known to the world when U.S. marines waded ashore there after Japan attacked the United States at Pearl Harbor. Despite the war's devastation years ago, not much of which now is evident, this small island has palms in abundance, which makes it attractive for collectors.

Also, the Palm Society is blessed by having there, in Honiara the main hub of the islands, a long-time and very active member, namely, Geoff (Mr. G.F.C.) Dennis. He made our visit in late July 1980, not only a delightful experience but, from a seed collector's point of view, a productive one as well. We had arrived there by air from Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, touching down at Henderson Field, which dates back to the war days. Honiara has a good hotel but Geoff Dennis saw to it that we were not to be stranded in it.

Right away we were motored to Honiara's interesting botanical garden, not far from the hotel, which has a good diversity of plants, including some splendid palm specimens. It should be said that Geoff Dennis, originally from Australia, not only laid out the plan for this garden but has grown up with it and supervised its development and maintenance.

For many years we had been led to believe that *Pelagodoxa henryana*, presumably indigenous to the Marquesas, couldn't be found, or at least, one shouldn't go exploring for it away from the Marquesas-Tahiti area of the South Pacific.

But see the beautiful, perhaps perfect, specimen of *Pelagodoxa henryana* which Geoff Dennis has cultivated in the Garden at Honiara (Fig. 1). *Principes* (24: 37-38, 1980) has some notes on how *Pelagodoxa* got to the Solomon Islands. But your author is not entirely convinced, especially after Palm Society member, Dick Phillips, guided us to long-established, prolifically fruiting plants of *Pelagodoxa* in nearby Suva, Fiji. The Honiara



1. Geoff Dennis introduces your author to a magnificent *Pelagodoxa* in the Honiara Botanical Garden, Guadalcanal.



2. *Elaeis guineensis* in cultivation near Honiara.

garden has other exotic species of palms, as well as indigenes, that can be seen in outer recesses of the garden, which one must reach by trudging up and down some well laid out pathways.

Interesting as the garden is, Guadalcanal has many more attractions for palm enthusiasts. For economic reasons, the oil palm (*Elaeis guineensis*) is being cultivated on the island (Fig. 2).

Geoff Dennis took us out of Honiara to places he knew palms were growing. In fact, we suspected that he had a hidden computer, which at the touch of a button would "home" him in on a palm! After a bit of driving we came to a river which could be forded, and along its bank, somewhat obscured by other tall trees, was a

fine stand of mature *Actinorhytis calapparia* (Fig. 3). This palm is not indigenous to the Solomon Islands and how it got established on Guadalcanal we don't know. But the trees were fruiting when we were there, and with Geoff's help we collected a good number of these large, heavy seeds for The Palm Society Seed Bank. Many of them from fallen fruits in moist ground cover were already germinating.

Geoff took us into other areas which were fascinating as well as fruitful. Back in Honiara, he showed us his palm garden at home. His property is level in front but somewhat precipitous in the rear. It has a fine collection of exotic plants in addition to palms (see Fig. 4).

But one never leaves Guadalcanal with-



3. *Actinorhysis calapparia* on Guadalcanal.



4. *Pritchardia* in Geoff Dennis' home garden, Honiara.

out a boat trip around the bay and up the river, during which the utterly delightful "locals"—both young and older—clamber aboard and join in, just for the fun of it. During the voyage one can see, at the bottom of the clear waters of the bay, the rusted remains of fallen aircraft and other implements of war that belie the beauty of the palms on shore, nearby. Thank goodness palms don't rust, and they are still there on Guadalcanal!