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## Hyphaene petersiana Amongst Animals in the Heartland of Africa

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Africa, with its vast northern spread of the Sahara, hardly qualifies as the continent most sought out by palm collectors. But it has other attractions, of course, which make it well worth visiting.

Africa is the indigenous source of one of the world's most interesting palm genera, namely, *Hyphaene*, which has some 35-40 species dispersed mostly over Africa.

Our safari went into Zimbabwe, Zambia and Botswana. Some of the trip was easy, some of it rough, and frankly we saw more animals than palms.

We were in Harare, Zimbabwe (formerly Salisbury, Rhodesia) one day before going on safari. It was our privilege to be met there by Ian Turner, who devoted his attention to showing us the magnificent plantings at home, Spring Farm, 15 miles from town, as well as escorting us to nearby Evanrigg Botanical Aloe Gardens, Harare Botanical Gardens in the city, and through the palm-lined streets which make Harare attractive. Listed in order of their numbers, the three palms most frequently seen in landscaping the city streets, only the last native to the area, are (1) *Washingtonia robusta*, (2) *Arecastrum roman-zoffianum* and (3) *Phoenix reclinata*. The Harare Botanical Gardens contain over 100 acres devoted mostly to native Zimbabwean trees and plants with many specimens of the beautiful *Hyphaene petersiana*\* (here labelled *H. benguellensis* var.

*ventricosa*). The garden is yet to be developed to its potential.

It was in Ian Turner's gardens that we viewed the largest and most beautiful collection of palms we saw on the entire trip. They were even more notable, perhaps, for Ian's collection of cycads. The location of Spring Farm seemed ideal for palm cultivation. It is at an elevation of 4,000 feet with rich, well-drained soil, ditches of diverted spring water flowing under large native trees which provided shade for undercover palm specimens. Most impressive to us was seeing Ian's very extensive collection of palms, many species of which had been started from seeds received from The Palm Society Seed Bank as well as exchanges with members. He had *Chamaedorea* from Las Cruces, *Neodypsis lastelliana* (obtained from M. Darian, of California) and species of *Livistona* which he got from Palm Society member Maria Walford-Huggins, in Australia, and so on. Ian is a long-time member of The Palm Society, and, unfortunately, the only one still residing in Zimbabwe following the political upheavals there. Earlier there were others.

Before leaving Miami (July 8, 1982) we had talked with Dr. John Dransfield regarding palms in the area. He advised, "Mel, you can find *Hyphaene petersiana* at Victoria Falls. There are large stands

\* Editors' note: The nomenclature and taxonomy of *Hyphaene* is very complicated. Although *H. ven-*

*tricosa* is perhaps the most easily identified species and has been well known under this name, it should correctly be named *H. petersiana*.



1. Crown of *Hyphaene petersiana*, near Mfuwe, Zambia.

of them there." When we left on the trip we had no idea whether, due to our safari schedule, there would be time to look for seeds at the "Falls", but it was something to anticipate. We explored a great deal of south central Africa before our itinerary got us to the "Falls" to look for palms. Meanwhile, we came across them as we went along.

From Harare we flew to Kariba and its huge lake which borders Zimbabwe and Zambia. In small craft we flew over the lake to Bumi Hills, a safari destination of some renown, where we got an introduction to what might be ahead. But other than the episode of the elephant that climbed the hill on which our lodging was perched and plunged into the swimming

pool at 2:00 a.m. one morning, nothing much happened there, notwithstanding excellent food, good lodging and several not really exciting game drives. There were hardly any palms—not even in pots! This disenchanted your author.

Our small, low-flying aircraft took us to Mfuwe, in Zambia, where we were ensconced for several days. The Mfuwe Lodge has good living quarters, excellent food and the best game drivers we experienced. And here, not far from the airstrip where we landed, we first saw the palm we were looking for. *Hyphaene petersiana* is a handsome tree (Fig. 1) and should be sought out and dispersed as an ornamental much more widely than it is today. After experiencing some cold nights



2. Walking safari into the bush, Norman Carr in right foreground.

in Africa (we were there in winter and at elevations of some 4,000 to 6,000 feet) we believe *H. petersiana* could very well survive outside tropical and subtropical areas. Fairchild Tropical Garden, in Miami, has a specimen for everyone to see.

At Mfuwe we had the pleasure of meeting Norman Carr (naturalist, guide, and author) whose wisdom about things African is invaluable. He headed up our treks into the bush aboard safari Land Rovers and afoot. The treks afoot were hazardous and had to be accompanied by a gun-bearer—just in case! (Fig. 2).

But how do you collect viable seeds of *H. petersiana*? It wasn't as easy as one might imagine. Early at Mfuwe Lodge we discussed this with Norman Carr, who was unperturbed and said, simply, "The seeds are easy to collect and we shall bring them in for you." Well, collecting was, in a way, very simple. No tree climbing

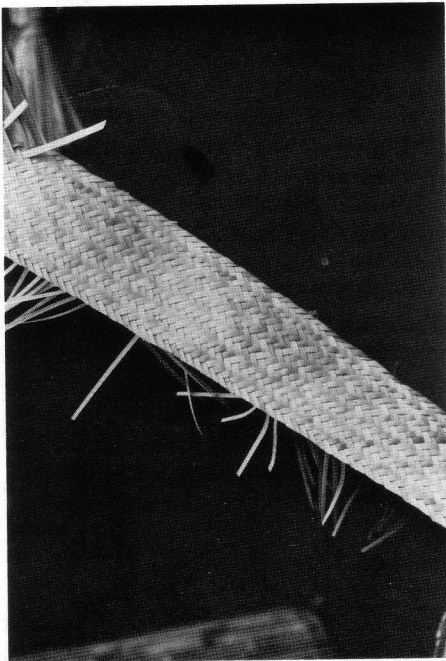
involved. One just picks the seeds out of elephant dung which is widely dispersed over the area (see small chunks on ground in Fig. 2). Norman Carr told us, "If you want viable seeds it's best to get them from fresh elephant dung. They are more likely to germinate."

No doubt but what Norman Carr is right. *H. petersiana* fruit is larger than a golf ball, but not quite tennis-ball size. The seed itself resembles a golf ball, perfectly round and very hard. The round shape distinguishes *H. petersiana* from other species of *Hyphaene*, most of the fruits of which are more pear- or heart-shaped, or otherwise. We will have more to say about elephants and their contributions later on.

Like all palms, *Hyphaene petersiana* has its practical side. The chief of a village we visited personally demonstrated his weaving skills with strips from fronds of



3. Chief of Zambian village weaves *H. petersiana* strips.



4. Finished woven mat.

this palm (Figs. 3,4). The people were very friendly as they showed us their life-style and permitted us to photograph them.

Within two miles of the Mfuwe airport, going to or from the Lodge, there is a large indigenous stand of *Hyphaene petersiana*. They were beautiful in front of clouds and fruiting above us (Figs. 5,6). Also in this area we found specimens, but no stand, of *Borassus aethiopum*. The characteristic bulge in the trunk is well illustrated in Figure 7.

The safari went on to Botswana in small, low-flying aircraft over the Kalahari Desert. Looking down on the thread-like elephant trails, a few palms were the only prominent living things in an arid, ocher landscape which stretched from horizon to horizon.

For two nights we were in a "tented" camp (Fig. 8). The safari here was excellent. We had a superb tracker (Fig. 9) who pursued the animals and helped us find palms. Again we found evidence of



5. *Hyphaene* forefronts the clouds.



6. *Hyphaene* in fruit.





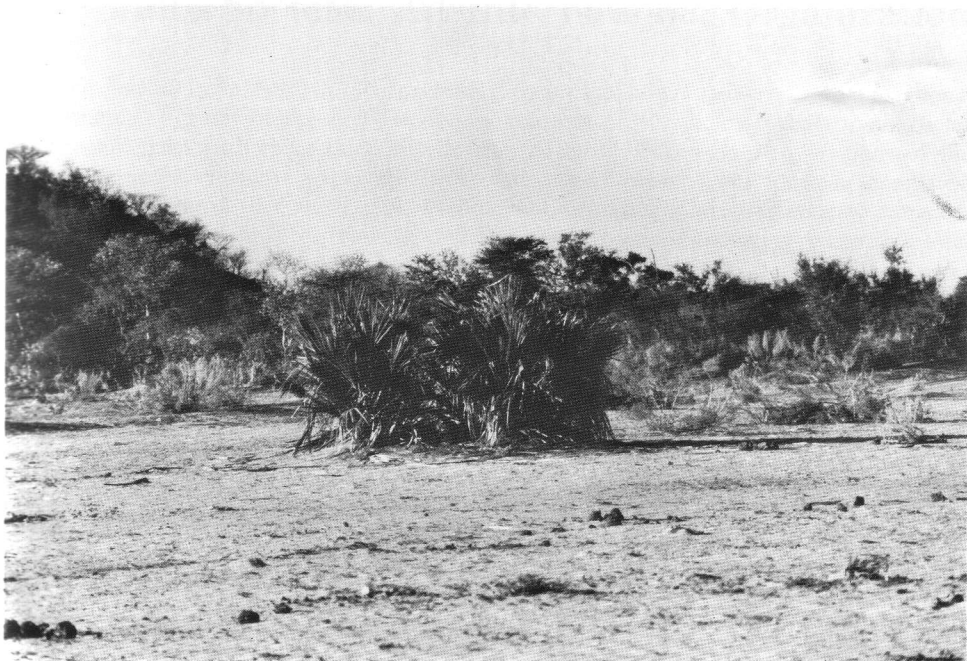
7. *Borassus aethiopum* with characteristic bulge in trunk.



8. Tented camp, Botswana.



9. Our safari tracker fronts large herd of hippos in their habitat.



10. Cluster of *Hyphaene* strives to exist in inhospitable though indigenous environment.



11. An impressive section of Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe.



12. *Hyphaene* along Zambezi River.



the elephant's proclivity for procreation as well as for destruction. A very tall *Hyphaene petersiana* loomed up in the far distance and we asked our guide to head for it. He did, and we collected a few fallen fruits. But no other mature palms were visible in any direction. Yet, in one utterly dry and uninteresting area we spotted a sturdy little cluster of palms rising up through the parched soil (Fig. 10). How did the elephants miss chewing up this little clump of *Hyphaene*, which they undoubtedly sired in the first place?

The safari wound down as we returned to Victoria Falls. Remember that Dr. Dransfield earlier had said we would find *Hyphaene petersiana* at the Falls. He was so right for the area is loaded with them.

While there were many things to do here, one of the most rewarding was an

overflight of the Falls in a small plane to capture a "limited" view (Fig. 11). The width of the Falls is too great to get all of it into a single picture. Africa for several years has had severe drought, yet it is estimated that 120 million gallons of water per minute run over the falls. From above we could see palms towering all over the area. Closer views, as we cruised the Zambezi River above the falls, show them lining the river banks and populating islands that dot the river (Fig. 12). In this area, *Hyphaene petersiana* is numerous as well as handsome.

But palm lovers will find no profound solace in a quest for palms in the heartlands of Africa. *Hyphaene* is worth going after, but one might better have something else in mind.

*Principes*, 27(4), 1983, p. 151

## The Palm Society: An International Organization

Palm Society members can take pride in the fact that theirs is indeed an international organization. Perusal of the first twenty-six volumes of *Principes* reveals that articles have come from authors in thirty-five foreign nations. Broken down by regions of the world, Latin America, as expected, leads with contributions from fourteen countries: Argentina, Bahamas, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Paraguay, Surinam, Trinidad, and Venezuela. Ranking second is Asia with a total of ten countries: India, Indonesia, Iraq, Japan, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka (Ceylon), Thailand, and the U.S.S.R. The European region follows with six of its nations: Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. Four African countries are thus far represented: Ghana, Libya, Nigeria, and South Africa. Last of all is Australia, representing Oceania. In future years we can look forward to other nations being added to this already impressive listing. It is entirely fitting that, beginning with the final issue of 1982, the cover of *Principes* bears the phrase "an international organization."

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