

Veitchia merrillii and its Karst Island Home

A. C. PODZORSKI

Hilleshög AB, Landskrona, Sweden

Towering 300 m above the waters of Bacuit Bay in northern Palawan, in the Philippines, the spectacular assagai karst limestone cliffs of Langen and neighboring islands are a newly recorded locality for *Veitchia merrillii* (Becc.) H. E. Moore.

This elegant palm, now widespread in cultivation, was first collected by Elmer in February 1911 about 400 km south, near Brooke's Point. In contrast to the Bacuit Bay locality, the palm grew in woodlands on sandy soil. Two years later, it was discovered by Merrill growing abundantly on the karst limestone of Apulit Island, some 100 km southeast of Bacuit Bay.

The Bacuit Bay discovery was made by the Palawan Botanical Expedition during a vegetation survey of Palawan in 1984. *Veitchia merrillii* was found to be most abundant on the karst outcrop summits, ridges, and in the sparse forest on steep slopes of fragmented karst blocks of Langen (also known as Malapakan) Island. In these exposed areas it seldom reached over ten meters high, but in protected locations heights of at least 25 m were attained. Only a few specimens were seen within dense forest. A few specimens were also seen growing on exposed rock within a few meters of the sea.

The climate of north Palawan is fairly dry with a rainfall of about 1,500 mm. March to May is very dry. This, combined with the karst limestone habitat, makes a tough environment. Relatively few species

were associated with *Veitchia merrillii*. The commonest of these were *Pleiomele cf. multiflora* (Warb.) Merr., *Euphorbia trigona* Haw., *Spondias acida* Bl., *Ochrosia glomerata* (Bl.) F. v. Muell., a squat and arborescent species of *Sterculia*, a massive, red-flowered species of *Bauhinia*, and a scrambling species of *Jasminum*.

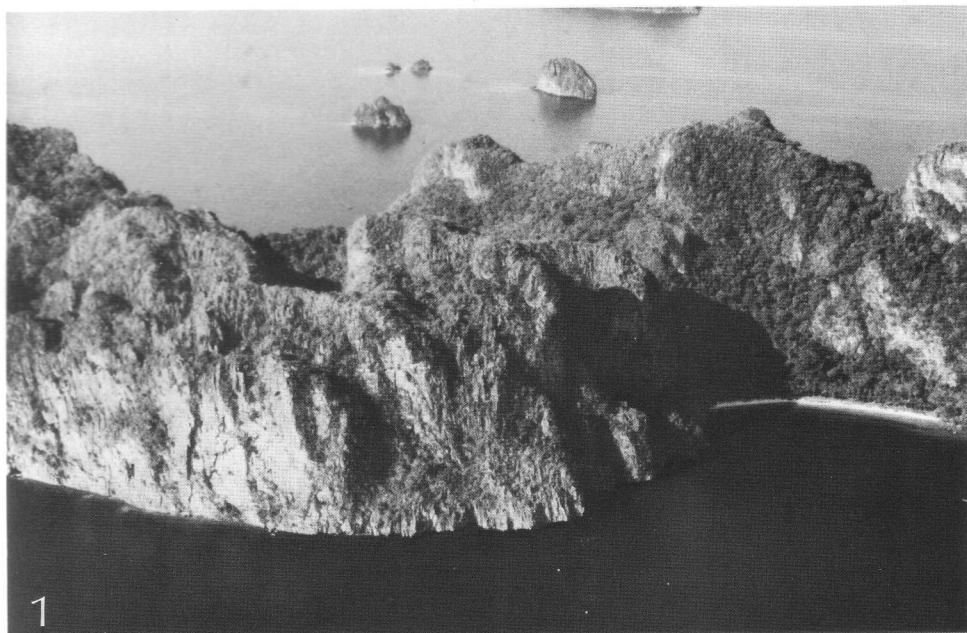
At the time of collection, April 1984, many palms were observed with well developed, but green, fruit.

Another interesting discovery was of two colonies of a species of *Livistona* somewhat resembling *L. rotundifolia* (Lam.) Mart. One was on the narrow ledges of a precipitous cliff-face of an isolated karst block. The second was seen from the air to be growing between densely packed limestone pinnacles on the summit of a major karst block. In deference to life and limb, neither population was collected!

At present the habitat of both palms is probably secure from destruction, due not least to the treacherousness of the terrain.

Acknowledgments

I am indebted to Mr. A. Emanuelsson (Hilleshög AB, Sweden) for backing the expedition, to Swedish Match-Hilleshög Philippines Inc. (Philippines) for financing the expedition and to the Philippine Ministry of Natural Resources for giving their official approval.



1. Langen Island, one of the karst island homes of *Veitchia merrillii* in northwest Palawan. 2. A pinnacle field, one of the habitats within which *Veitchia merrillii* grows.



3. *Veitchia merrillii* in fruit. 4. A colony of *Livistona* sp. on Langen Island.