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Worldwide Endangerment of Useful Palms

The *Palmae* consists of 200 genera and approximately 2,600 species. Most are native to the tropics. The Tropical American and Tropical Asian (including Australasia) regions are each rich in palm species, whereas Africa is very poor. Wherever they occur, native palms represent valuable forest resources and are used by local populations for food (fruit, palm heart, oil, starch, beverage); fiber (leaf, petiole, leaf-base); building material (stem, leaf, petiole); basketry and mats (leaf); medicine, etc. Commercial exploitation of natural palm stands for certain of these products is important in regional and national economies. Accelerating tropical forest cutting for agriculture, grazing and other purposes threatens this resource as well as the survival in the wild of a yet undetermined number of palm species. A project on palm utilization and conservation in Tropical America has as its objective to identify the species of economic importance, document local utilization patterns, and assess the status of species commercially exploited for domestic and foreign markets. A similar project is planned in Tropical Asia. In both regions the long-term objective is to establish a baseline for the formulation of management systems for palm-rich tropical forest areas. Among the palms under study are the açai (*Euterpe oleracea*) in the Lower Amazon Basin; the palmyra (*Borassus flabellifer*) in South India; and certain rattans (*Calamus* spp.) in peninsular Malaysia.

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