

Palm Hunting in The Exumas

MRS. GEORGE F. ADAMS

When we were invited to visit Georgetown, Great Exuma, in the Bahamas, I was not at all enthusiastic, imagining dried-up little islands without a palm in sight! However, Stanley Kiem, Superintendent of Fairchild Tropical Garden at Miami, Florida, assured me they were tremendously interesting botanically speaking, and very little had been done to classify the flora. He also asked me to try to collect specimens of *Coccothrinax argentata* (?) and *Pseudophoenix Sargentii*.

Georgetown is roughly one hundred miles south of Nassau in a long thin chain of Cays or small islands. We flew down from Nassau in an hour by four-engined Heron of Bahama Airways, but could not see much because of low clouds. The air strip at Georgetown is in rather a desolate area, as it was bulldozed and cut about two years ago. Now one sees only scrubby secondary growth.

What first caught my eye were the Geiger trees (*Cordia Sebestena*), the leaves a beautiful shade of green, large and shining, about five or six inches across and seven or eight long, with big clusters of brilliant flame-colored flowers, both larger and brighter than the ones found in southern Florida. The trees are everywhere, some with twisted, grotesque trunks growing right out of the solid rock within reach of the waves. The children call the tree "nuts" and eat the kernels of the fruits.

The contrast of the luxurious Club Peace and Plenty, where we stayed, and the very poor, somewhat primitive island was quite fantastic! The Club is only about a year old and is chiefly in aid of visiting yachtsmen, as the surrounding waters are a sailor's paradise. The color of the sea is absolutely breath-

taking, no one will believe it who has not seen it. There were miles and miles of beautiful white sandy beach, spotlessly clean, without a soul in sight, and crystal-clear blue water.

My first question naturally was "Where are the palms?" I was told there were plenty of "silver tops" and "cabbage palms" over on Stocking Island, which is about two miles to the eastward across the ten-mile-long harbor. However, it blew so hard the first week that we couldn't get over in a small boat.

Taking our first walk north of the club, I spotted a few small *Coccothrinax* in the scrubby growth near the rocky coast. There are goats tethered at intervals all along there and no doubt they eat the seedling palms as well as everything else within reach.

Later we were taken for a very bumpy ride to Symond's Point, about three miles to the northward, and I practically fell out of the jeep with excitement when I saw literally hundreds of *Coccothrinax* with their silvery fans waving in the breeze like beckoning white hands. Crashing happily through the brush, being torn to bits and stung by hornets, I hunted for palm blossoms or seeds but found none, probably because it was so late in the year (late November and early December).

Here and there all over Great Exuma there are small groves of coconut palms, all planted by someone's father or grandfather. Coconuts do not seem to germinate very readily there.

The people grow many winter vegetables, particularly onions for the Nassau market. They have some citrus, breadfruit, a few mango and avocado trees—all seedlings, I gathered from



49. *Pseudophoenix Sargentii* at bottom of steps leading to club-house on Stocking Island, transplanted from the wild. The trunk of the nearest measures 81 inches to bottom of leaf sheaths.

questioning various people, with the exception of one or two Haden mangos, very proudly pointed out to me.

Large ponds have been painstakingly

filled in with earth carried in baskets on peoples' heads and lovingly tended to grow very good tomatoes, cabbages, carrots, beets, okra, bananas, some



50. A young *Pseudophoenix Sargentii* growing naturally on Stocking Island southwest of the club-house.

sorghum and a little cane. Elsewhere it is terribly rocky and one is amazed that anything can grow at all.

When the wind abated we sailed over to Stocking Island and saw the handsome *Pseudophoenix Sargentii* which were used to landscape the grounds of the Yacht Haven. They had been transplanted without root pruning but looked beautiful. Flanking each side of the steps leading up-hill to the small club-house were six of the largest *Pseudophoenix* I've ever seen. One was seven feet six inches from the ground to base of leaf-sheath, with 80 leaf-scars on the trunk; width between rings varies very much from a bare line to three inches.

The ground has largely been cleared around the club-house but fortunately all the "silver tops" and "brickel tops"

(*Coccothrinax* and *Thrinax*), as well as the pretty little "joe-wood" trees (*Jacquinia keyensis*) have been left. The latter have silvery-grey and black markings on the trunks, and both flowers and fruits at the same time. There is also another smaller bush with grey-green linear leaves and small pinkish-lilac flowers. Both of these last with their rather angular flat-topped wind-blown somewhat oriental appearance would drive the landscape people wild!

A fine old gentleman living on the island told me the "cabbage" or *Pseudophoenix* grew over to the north in a hidden fold of the hills. He tried to get a man to guide me to the spot, but was unsuccessful; however, I went on another of my "crashing" expeditions, slipping and sliding, hacking my way through the thick brush under the "silver tops," but unfortunately never came across the big stand of *Pseudophoenix*. There were plenty of isolated ones here and there, presumably from seeds dropped by birds.

In the old gentleman's garden there were several fine specimens, including the only one I saw with fruits. This one had three large bunches, two green, the other bright cherry red, some of which I collected for Fairchild Tropical Garden. Another striking feature of this garden was a pair of very large silver buttonwood trees (*Conocarpus erecta* var. *sericea*). They are twenty-five to thirty feet high, and just as wide. Fluttering and shining in the sun, they were a lovely sight. The silver and duller-leaved buttonwoods grow all over Exuma down to and into the seawater. They are very attractive mixed in with the darker green foliage on the hillsides.

From studying the *Coccothrinax* quite closely, I would venture a guess that there are two kinds of *argentata*—one with the fan open at the hastula,

the other with the segments meeting. There was another *Coccothrinax* which looked rather like *C. Miraguama*, with the segments swirled past each other at the hastula, but without the distinctive fibre mat of *C. Miraguama*. Still another had very wavy fans, reminiscent of *Livistona chinensis*.

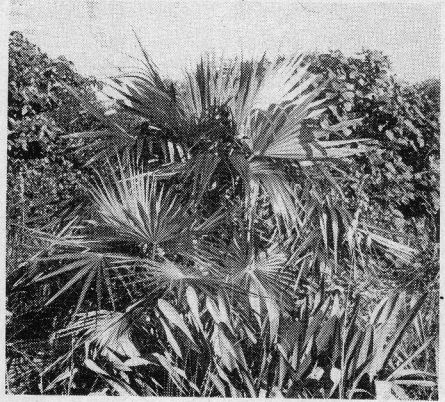
There were few fruits to be found on the very silvery *C. argentata*. Those I collected for Fairchild Garden seemed larger, plumper and juicier than the ones we see in southern Florida; they were of a deep grape-purple color.

Of the *Thrinax* species found, one was *T. microcarpa*; the other resembled *T. parviflora*, with its white fruits, while another had very long (dead) flower spikes reaching to the ground.

On another trip to the south coast of Exuma near the bone-fishing grounds, there was a very large colony of *Thrinax (parviflora?)*; many of them had great masses of *Oncidium* and *Broughtonia* on the trunks. There were no



51. This *Coccothrinax* on Fowl Key was very silvery and had wavy leaves.



52. *Coccothrinax* on Fowl Key appearing more like *C. argentata* than anything else seen. Strap-shaped leaves in the foreground are those of a *Crinum*.

flowers at the time but I was told that the *Oncidium* flowers are yellow spotted with brown, and the *Broughtonia* has pinkish-lilac flowers.

In a boggy area to the north of the airstrip, *Sabal Palmetto* or "pond top" was found ("very good for baskets!"). The plants seemed to differ a bit from the Florida kind, the leaf blade much arched, with many "strings" hanging below. These palms had come up in the past two years, since the area had been bulldozed. None had yet made a trunk; the largest had leaf petioles four to five feet long. There were many very large old trunks lying around, some as much as twelve feet long.

The islands were beautifully fresh and green, as there have been two years of good rainfall. Twenty-eight to thirty inches per annum is the average. However I was told of one drought which lasted nearly two years; the people suffered greatly as rainwater catchments are the only source of supply in most places. There are many wells, but most of them become brackish when rainfall is low.

In the center of Georgetown there is a very large *Ficus nitida*, known as "THE Evergreen". No one knows who

planted it. Elsewhere I saw a *Ficus religiosa* and two *Salmalea malabarica*, as well as other familiar trees and shrubs. The number of plants I *did not* know or even vaguely recognise was legion; it would be a fascinating place for a trained botanist, I would say.

On the way home to Florida we spent a few days with friends in Nassau. I had the great pleasure of visiting Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Langlois and seeing their magnificent palms once more. I was specially eager to see Dr. Fairchild's *Areca* species 208; it has grown enormously since my previous visit, and is perfectly beautiful. Then I was shown the glorious *Stevensonia Borsigiana*. It is really breathtaking with its orange leaf-stalks and almost entire leaves spotted with orange. Hearing so many names new to me made me feel appallingly ignorant, but this did not interfere with my enjoyment. Mr. and Mrs. Langlois sent all members of The Palm Society their kind regards and good wishes.

Editor's Corner

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of a member who remains anonymous by request appear in this issue for the first but we hope by no means the last time under the title "Notes of a Palmophile." Since the Editor was once saved from a 100 foot fall by a large barrel cactus into which he rolled backwards, he has mixed feelings about the manner in which one may become a palmophobe according to our nameless correspondent (page 101). Perhaps one may learn to love even *Acrocomia*.

Mr. Robert L. Bishop of Lake Grove, Oregon, whose notes on palms in Oregon appear elsewhere in this issue and in *Principes* 1: 99, 1957, adds the following in a letter. "*Trachycarpus Fortunei* is probably the only palm which has truly been proven hardy in western Oregon. I have located about 35 ma-

ture specimens in the past three years here, ranging from sea level to 2000 feet in elevation. The girl in the photos (see page 111) is my daughter Barbara, who incidentally is 12 years old and precisely five feet tall."

The April mail brought a most generous offer from a member in Malaya whose letter is reproduced herewith:

DEAR SIR,

I read with interest the article on "Diseases of the Coconut Palm" by Dr. Corbett in your *PRINCIPES* Vol. 3, No. 1, January 1959 issue.

The green, yellow and golden varieties seed nuts of the Malayan dwarf coconut from parent trees in pure stands for planting purposes are available in large quantities here. Should your members require any for planting, I am prepared to offer my services free of all charge. But the cost of the nuts, shipping and documentary fees, etc., must be paid.

Those who are interested please write to me at P. O. Box 105, Kulai, Johore, Malaya.

Yours faithfully,

TAN AH KING

NOTES OF A PALMOPHILE

Though Webster never heard of one, a palmophile is, as you correctly surmise, a lover of palms; but in plain American speech he is more likely to be called a "palm nut" or a "bug on palms," the same kind of fellow that would be termed in *Time*-ese a "palm buff." Due to the universal attention accorded the palms in poetry, in prose, in song and even in the Scriptures, they evoke dreams of tropic grandeur and other assorted romantic notions in almost everybody, everywhere. But these millions are not palmophiles; they merely approve of the palms in general, as they approve of flowers, trees, angels, champagne, the moon.