

PALM LITERATURE

PALMS OF THE FIJI ISLANDS. Dick Watling. Illustrated by George Bennett. Environmental Consultants (Fiji) Ltd, 2005. ISBN: 982-9047-02-4. Price US\$39.95, soft cover. Pp 192. Available to order online at: www.environmentfiji.com.

Anyone interested in Fiji's amazing palms or planning to visit Fiji should buy this book. Dick Watling has managed to write one of the best general books on palms I have seen anywhere. In addition, this book will also prove satisfying to people who grow palms (horticulturalists, landscapers and gardeners), people who study palms (botanists, ecologist and natural historians) and to conservationists. The beautiful illustrations provided by George Bennett may alone be another reason to have this on your bookshelf.

The book presents a detailed account of 32 species of palms including 26 native and 6 naturalized species accounts. At the last count, 24 of the 26 native species found in Fiji are found nowhere else in the world, which means an impressive 92% are endemic. Additionally around half have very limited natural ranges. The species accounts include general descriptions, distribution (including maps), habit and ecology information, details of cultural uses (if known), conservation status and of course the beautiful color illustrations. The illustrations focus on habit (usually showing a mature tree in its native habitat) and mature fruit – both of which are excellent ways to identify Fiji's palms while in the field. There are also sections on propagation and culture (how to grow these palms and where to find them in existing collections). A general overview of the vegetation of Fiji and a detailed account of the conservation status of Fiji's palms including a summary of the current situation on the ground in the country are provided. There are also a number useful tables and charts included throughout the book plus maps on both covers and an altitudinal range guide inside the back cover.

The first section of the book is the introduction, which sets the scene, so to speak, by covering the purpose of and how to use the book, as well as a basic guide to identifying

palms. The second section covers "Fiji: The Country, Vegetation and the Palm Flora" giving the reader 25 pages on the general vegetation of Fiji, details on the diversity and how Fiji's palms might be distributed – including a very interesting table on potential birds and bats that may be agents for palm dispersal around Fiji. This section also has a detailed up-to-date account on the conservation status of the palms within Fiji, including a call to action to help protect and study these unique trees.

The third section is by far the largest, covering the species accounts first with the native species and then the naturalized. Species accounts are listed in alphabetical order; there is no identification key. Most species accounts are 4 or 5 pages long with the text, including a description and additional details plus a distribution map and then at least two illustrations, which should help with identification. The fourth and final major section covers "Propagation and Culture of Fiji's Native Palms," and this may be one of the more interesting parts for those of us interested in growing palms. This chapter was written by the late Dick Phillips, who was a true champion of palms within and without Fiji. This account gives us a wealth of information on how to grow most Fijian palms as well as some ideas of where to find these palms in cultivation within Fiji and around the world. All of Fiji's palms are of course handsome to the palm enthusiast, yet only a small percentage are known to be widely cultivated. Perhaps this section will encourage new legal efforts to cultivate Fiji's palms. The book includes a good reference section, glossary and a useful index.

This book is specifically aimed at the non-specialist. However, I encourage all readers of PALMS to buy a copy. Mr. Watling's background is as an ecologist, environmental consultant and bird expert – which means he has given the book a strong slant for people who want to see palms in the wild or who want to protect or grow palms. The book is also not too heavy and can easily fit in any day pack or carry-on bag for the long flight to Fiji from North America, Europe or Asia.

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