

Dypsis ambositrae

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On the high plateau of Madagascar, south of the town of Ambositra and in a rocky valley at ca.1440 m above sea level, a very rare palm stills clings to existence: *Dypsis ambositrae* (Fig. 1). This species was first described by Dransfield and Beentje in *The Palms of Madagascar* (1995), and they commented, "...in 1992 12 trees were known and by 1994 at least 5 of these had been cut down." By 1999, only 2 palms remained, and these were cut for fuel shortly thereafter (pers. obs.). Several small juveniles were obtained from local villagers in 2003 and are surviving in Tsimbazaza Botanical and Zoological Gardens in Antananarivo. In 2005, a single 14 m tree was shown to us, and several hundred old seeds were collected. The seeds (ca. 11 × 9 mm) had fibrous endocarps and were sparsely ruminant to 2 mm. This year we returned to be shown a small farm containing three mature specimens. These are protected by local fady (tradition), and we learned that a few others were still alive but "far away." Reasonably fresh seeds were collected, and prospective seedlings will be distributed to various tropical and subtropical botanic gardens and serious palm collectors.

The world of palm collecting is awash with various palm species described as *Dypsis ambositrae*. Few, if any, fit the description of the species, and this is hardly surprising as fertile seeds have rarely if ever been collected. The juvenile of the species is highly colorful with red petioles and leaf rachis. Later development shows a thickset palm with a grey white crown shaft. Some of these have one or two suckers, but it appears that suckers are lost by fire as the main stem matures.

The region in which this palm grows is small in area. Unless further populations are found,

the prospect of these singular palms becoming extinct in their natural habitat is very real. (Editors' Note: an additional healthy population with substantial regeneration was discovered in 2003 by Tianjanahary Ranarivelo, Royal Botanic Gardens Kew in Madagascar).

Acknowledgments

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1. *Dypsis ambositrae*. Photo by John Dransfield.





Once again we will offer a *Palm Tour of the Amazon*. This tour is designed for palm enthusiasts who are interested in experiencing the rich and diverse palm flora of the Amazon. We will explore the central Amazon region, a fascinating ecosystem with a great diversity of plants, animals, birds, and fish. The region includes a variety of palm habitats and we will look for several interesting species – *Barcella odora*, *Municaria saccifera*, *Leopoldinia pulchra*, *Leopoldinia major*, *Leopoldinia piassaba*, *Mauritiella aculeata*, *Mauritia carana*, and *Euterpe catinga*. Along the river margins and in nearby forests we will see a great variety of species of *Syagrus*, *Hyospathe*, *Socratea*, *Iriartella*, *Oenocarpus*, *Geonoma*, *Bactris*, *Astrocaryum*, *Mauritia*, and *Euterpe*. On each of the previous trips we have seen between 50 and 60 different species of palm.

The trip is planned to take advantage of the good weather of the dry season. We will live and travel aboard a brand-new, comfortable Amazonian riverboat. The boat has fans, showers, and toilets in each cabin, and a small library of books on Amazonian natural history. The owner/captain is the legendary Amazon guide Moacir Fortes, who took us on our earlier trips. "Mo", as he is known to one and all, is fluent in several languages, and enjoys sharing the fascinating, and often humorous, legends of the Amazon region, where he grew up.

In our motorized canoes we can travel among the rain forest trees, enjoying close up views of palms and other plant and animal life (on previous trips we have seen the giant Amazon water lily and an anaconda!). We will often get off our boat for short hikes in the forest, and to visit the friendly "caboclos" who live along the riverbanks. These people use an amazing variety of palms in their daily lives, and always know of some interesting palm that grows "not far away"! Frequent swims, fishing opportunities, and occasional cookouts add to the enjoyment of our trip. In Manaus, our port of departure in Brazil, we will visit the famous Opera House and be able to buy such artifacts as hammocks made from palm fiber, and also sample ice cream made from the fruits of *Euterpe* and *Astrocaryum*!

The tour will be led by Dr. Andrew Henderson of the New York Botanical Garden. Henderson is author of *Palms of the Amazon* and *Field Guide to the Palms of the Americas*. The 10-day trip is planned for 5-15th October 2007. For additional information see <http://www.nybg.org/botany/amazonpalmtour/> or contact Andrew Henderson at ahenderson@nybg.org, or by phone at 718 817 8973, or by mail at The New York Botanical Garden, Bronx, NY 10458.

Fee: estimated \$3400 including round trip airfare from Miami, accommodation, meals, and field trips.