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The Wilson Botanical Garden

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Most folks have never even heard of it, but probably the second largest collection of palm species on earth grows far from any major city, at the southern extremity of Costa Rica, almost on the Panamanian border.

Not just a huge collection of palms, it is one of the most complete of all tropical botanical gardens. In addition to about 600 species of palms, it also boasts remarkable collections of cycads, heliconias, bromeliads, tree ferns, orchids, marantas, and bamboos, all of them located on 342 acres of rolling land, part of which is beautifully landscaped, but most of which remains as natural rainforest.

It is the Wilson Botanical Garden; also known as the Jardín Botánico Robert y Catherine Wilson; previously known as the Las Cruces Botanical Garden. The Garden was established in 1963 by an American named Bob Wilson. In 1973 the property was transferred to the OTS (Organization for Tropical Studies, a consortium of universities which offer courses in tropical biology and agroecology). In 1986, due to Wilson's age and failing health, Luis Gomez took over as Director. Bob Wilson died in 1989.

Because it is a biological field station, the Wilson Botanical Garden also possesses a research/residence building with newly expanded laboratory facilities, and with sleeping and dining facilities for up to about 40 students and guests. Additional living facilities are available in the nearby town of San Vito; reservations in advance are advisable.

The schedules of various tropical biol-

ogy courses based at the Garden vary from year to year, so reservations for space in the residence building at the Wilson Botanical Garden are necessary well in advance. That fact, right now, is pressingly urgent to the International Palm Society—for the reason that the 1992 Biennial meeting of that society already has been scheduled to be centered in Miami, Florida, with a "probable" post-biennial meeting in Costa Rica.

Now, back to the features of the Wilson Botanical Garden.

Yes, this Garden is out of the way; it is located on the southern extremity of Costa Rica. But the five-hour bus trip from San Jose (the capital city of that nation, where planes from Miami land) to the Gardens will not be a monotony. Far from it—interspersed during that trip are several small towns, each of which has shops selling locally made items, and each of which has cafes which serve local specialties. The road traverses forested highlands, and immediately beside the road in many places are the strikingly huge leaves of the attractive plant *Gunnera*. Immediately after your bus leaves the pan-American highway for the side road to San Vito, it reaches the alligator infested Rio Terraba River, over which a bridge has been started, but which, as of this writing, is not completed. So your bus crosses via a ferry-scow which seems precariously small and unsafe. For certain, no passenger will be sleeping here! And starting immediately after the river crossing are assorted native and exotic palms; these continue intermittently until the bus enters the Wilson Garden, when palms



1. This photo, taken at the Jardin Botanico Wilson, features a lineup of *Pigafetta filaris*, David's Fairchild's favorite palm, native to the Moluccas, Sulawesi, and New Guinea.

become conspicuous rather than an occasional sight.

The photos which illustrate this article provide but a few examples of the wealth of mature tropical palms on display, not just as single specimens but rather in groups and groves. Seemingly, whatever might be one's main specialty palm interest, here that specialty abounds. For example, Don Hodel, in researching his soon-to-be published book on *Chamaedorea* palms, found many of the previously unnamed *Chamaedorea* species already collected from the wild, already planted, and already growing happily in the ideal palm environment at the Wilson Botanical Gardens—

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2. Profiled in the center of this photo is a rare Madagascan palm, *Phloga polystachya*, one of the 600 exotic and native palm species which have been accessioned at Jardin Botanico Wilson in Costa Rica.

where nature provides an average of 157 inches of annual rainfall plus other ideal growing conditions which in most other botanical gardens, and in most of our home gardens, must be artificially synthesized by man.

Study at the Wilson Botanical Garden is almost a prerequisite for any student who desires a graduate degree in tropical horticulture. Similarly, a visit to the Wilson Botanical Garden is equally important to

any serious palm enthusiast. And the most enjoyable time to visit it is in company with fellow members of the International Palm Society.

So, when the first opportunity comes for signing up for the 1992 IPS Biennial Meeting, simultaneously make a deliberate effort to sign up for any offered post-biennial meeting which includes the Wilson Botanical Garden, in Costa Rica. Visiting it will be something like life's fulfillment.

BOOKSTORE

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