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## The Historical Introduction of *Copernicia baileyana* from Cuba to Hispaniola

CARLO MORICI<sup>1</sup>, LEONEL A. MERA<sup>2</sup> AND MANUEL CABALLERO RUANO<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Palmetum de Santa Cruz de Tenerife, Parque Marítimo, 38001 Canarias, Spain*

<sup>2</sup> *Apartado 883, Santiago de los Caballeros, Dominican Republic*

In October 1997 we were cruising the provinces of the Dominican Republic, trying to visit as many *Coccothrinax* populations as we could in just a few days.

One day, Leonel convinced the other two of us to go through an area mostly devoted to tobacco

plantation, where the only wild palms were the ubiquitous *Sabal domingensis* and *Roystonea borinquena*. We stopped in La Delgada, 10 km W of Santiago de los Caballeros, a countryside settlement which revealed itself to be a place of botanical marvels.



1. The branched *Sabal domingensis*, in La Delgada.



2. Close-up of the branching portion of the trunk of *Sabal domingensis*, in La Delgada.

The first surprising sight in the area is a specimen of *Sabal domingensis*, growing in the garden of a private house. This plant had suffered multiple branching and its trunk splits at about 2 m of height into 13 different branches. The total height of the plant is about 15 m.

Less than a mile away from the branched *Sabal*, grows the second surprise: a spectacular *Copernicia baileyana*. This palm is an endemic of the savannas of central Cuba and it is really uncommon in cultivation, even in Cuba, probably due to its slow growth rate. The old and healthy specimen of La Delgada appeared unique in that ocean of *Sabal* and *Roystonea*.

The man responsible of this marvel was Juan de la Cruz Martínez, from Santa María de Puerto Príncipe, Province of Camagüey, Cuba. This man left Cuba with his family during the Cuban Revolution of 1868, with the aim of avoiding his son being recruited in the army. The family moved to San Francisco de Jacagua (Dominican Republic), where they started to grow crops commercially. Juan de la Cruz went back to Cuba in 1883 and sent, to a man named Francisco Antonio Espaillat García, seeds of yarey cubano (*Copernicia baileyana*) together with cuttings of roses of different kinds and piñón cubano (*Gliricidia sepium*). These seeds germinated in the Hacienda Espaillat and the only survivor of this introduction is now 115 years old or only a few years younger. Afterwards, local

people reproduced this palm from seeds and five of this *Copernicia baileyana* became adults.

The oldest mother plant (the one pictured in this paper) is growing in antigua finca de los Minaya en el Cruce de La Delgada. The other younger adults are located in: 1) La Delgada, three km east of the oldest plant, in the property of the heirs of José Manuel Mera. 2) Two grow in La Ciénaga (property of Fernando León, I.P.S. Member). 3) Three smaller specimens grow in the garden of the late Víctor Espaillat Mera (grandson of F.A. Espaillat García), and they have just started to set fruit.

All these palms feel at home in the flatlands of central Hispaniola, somehow similar to their native Cuban savannas. These adult plants produce regularly fertile seeds and some saplings are growing around most of the adult plants mentioned. The area in which these palms grow is quite far from the natural populations of *Copernicia berteriana*, the only indigenous *Copernicia* of the Dominican Republic, so, hybridization is not likely to occur.

A bibliographical note:

Most of the information about the origin of the copernicias published in this paper comes from a small article published by J. Agustín Concepción on the Dominican Newspaper "Listín Diario" on February, 23<sup>rd</sup> 1985: "Cubanos Martínez en Jacagua," in the section "Genealógicas"

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