

CONTENTS

125 Palm Leaves as Writing Material: History and Method of Processing in Kerala

P.K. PADMAKUMAR, V.B. SREEKUMAR, V.V. RANGAN AND
C. RENUKA

130 Remembrances of Kenneth C. Foster

DONALD R. HODEL

135 Pollination in the Coco-de-Mer, *Lodoicea maldivica*

J. GERLACH

139 A New Stoloniferous *Pinanga* from Peninsular Malaysia

SAW LENG GUAN

143 *Trachycarpus geminisectus*, the Eight Peaks Fan Palm, a New Species from Vietnam

MARTIN GIBBONS, TOBIAS W. SPANNER, NGUYEN VAN DU
AND PHUONG ANH

151 The Native Palms of Dominica

SCOTT ZONA, ARLINGTON JAMES AND KATHERINE MAIDMAN

158 Tracking Down Alcide d'Orbigny's Chonta Palm in Bolivia

FRANCIS KAHN

BACK COVER

Trachycarpus geminisectus growing on a limestone hill, Chong To Tien,
Vietnam. See article by Gibbons et al., page 143.

Features

News from the World of Palms	124
Photo Features	134, 169
Palm Literature	149, 162
Classified	164
Palm Research in 2002	165
Obituaries	168, 170



D'Orbigny's chonta palm, as
illustrated in a 19th century
engraving. See article by F. Kahn, p.
158.



NEWS FROM THE WORLD OF PALMS

We are saddened to learn of the deaths of two persons well known to many IPS members. August Braun and Robert Read both passed away recently. Their contributions to the world of palms are noted in their obituaries, found on pages 168 and 170 of this issue. They will be greatly missed.

On 14 May 2003 the *Times* of London reported the death of a Chusan palm, *Trachycarpus fortunei* – no ordinary Chusan palm, but one planted 152 years ago by Queen Victoria in the grounds of her country retreat, Osborne House, on the Isle of Wight in southern England, the palm thus outliving its planter by 102 years. The palm was grown from seed brought back by the famous plant collector and explorer, Robert Fortune, and presented to Queen Victoria, who planted it when it at Osborne House on 24 May 1851. It eventually reached a height of 35 feet. It survived until the spring of 2002 when it was battered by fierce north-easterly gales. A year later, the palm had not recovered and so was felled. Debs Goodenough, head gardener, plans to plant a replacement Chusan palm grown from seed from the original planting.

A recent publication suggesting a link between palms and human evolution might be of interest to IPS members. The paper, by N.J. Dominy, J.-C. Svenning and W.-H. Li, is entitled “Historical contingency in the evolution of primate color vision” (*Jour. Human Evol.* 44: 25–45. 2003). The authors put forth an intriguing theory that attempts to explain the variation in color vision systems found in the world’s primates (lemurs, monkeys, apes, etc.), including the trichromatic vision system that we humans enjoy. They set up an evolutionary scenario in which early primates depended on palm and fig fruits for food, and the plants depended on the primates for seed dispersal. The scenario is not difficult to imagine, as palms and figs are known to ecologists as

“keystone species,” meaning that these species support a disproportionate amount of the fruit-eating animals in their habitats.

Dominy and colleagues envisioned a scenario in which ancestral primates with color-limited (dichromatic) vision evolved in forest habitats rich in palms and figs. The authors supposed that ancestral palms (and figs) possessed inconspicuously colored fruits, and there is evidence that dichromatic vision is advantageous for locating such fruits in low-light settings. Climatic change and deterioration led to the widespread extinction of palms in Africa and Southeast Asia, wherein evolution favored the development of trichromatic vision, as primates shifted to eating the reddish new leaves and shoots of trees.

Once primates, including the ancestors to humans, acquired trichromatic vision, the relationship between palms and primates favored palms (and figs) with brightly colored fruits. By examining the fruit colors of figs and palms in the modern floras in the Americas, Africa and Asia, the authors found some support for their theory. In regions inhabited by primates with dichromatic vision (South America, Madagascar), palms more frequently have dull colored fruits, but in Asia and Africa, where modern primates are trichromatic, the floras are rich in palms with red, orange or yellow fruits.

If Dominy and his colleagues are correct, then our ancestors acquired color vision when palms became scarce food items. Thus, the bond between palms and humans is more ancient and more intimate than we ever imagined. Having seen how eagerly IPS members snap up free seeds offered at local chapter meetings and how easily they spot ripe fruits on palms in gardens, we know that the link between palms and people remains unbroken.

THE EDITORS