

## OBITUARY

## ROBERT WILLIAM READ (1931–2003)

Dr. Robert (Bob) Read of Naples, Florida, died 15 July 2003, of complications from pneumonia and heart disease. He was 71 years old.

Dr. Read, botanist, author and longtime member of the International Palm Society, was borne in Woodbury, New Jersey in 1931. He graduated in 1958 from the University of Miami. At Cornell University he studied under Dr. H.E. Moore and earned his M.S. degree; his thesis was a taxonomic study of the genus *Pseudophoenix*. He received his Ph.D. in Jamaica at the University of the West Indies in 1968; the genus *Thrinax* was the topic of his dissertation.

Dr. Read worked at Fairchild Tropical Garden in Coral Gables, Florida, from 1961 to 1965, and in 1968 he became a member of the botany staff at the National Museum of Natural History of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., where he remained until his retirement in 1989. He studied palms in Cuba, Hispaniola, Jamaica, Costa Rica, Mexico, Sri Lanka, Bahamas and Hawaii, and described several new species including *Coccothrinax inaguensis*, *C. jamaicensis*, *C. proctorii* and *Colpothrinax cookii*. Some of his other publications discussed seedling culture, pollen storage, palm chromosomes and palm ecology. In 1980, Dr. Hermilo Quero named *Coccothrinax readii* from the Yucatan Peninsula, Mexico, in Dr. Read's honor.

His other botanical interests included orchids and bromeliads, and in fact, he described many new species of bromeliads, based on the collections at the Smithsonian. During his tenure at Fairchild Tropical Garden, he established the herbarium, taught classes on bromeliads, palms and flowering vines, and testified in a court case in San Antonio, Texas. Read was called as an expert witness in a case brought by the city of San Antonio against a landscape contractor who sold cold-tender *Washingtonia robusta* palms to the city when the contract specified *Sabal*. When the palms were subsequently killed by cold weather, Read testified that the palms were *Washingtonia*, not *Sabal*, and the city won its case.

Bob Read as a scientist contributed to the greater understanding of the family of palms; as a grower he enjoyed the creation of both his own garden and a new botanical garden in Naples, Florida; as a friend he shared generously his love of all plants. He will be missed.

LIBBY BESSE  
Sarasota, Florida, USA

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