

PALM NEWS

A recent letter by D.M.J.S. Bowman et al. (Nature 520: 33. 2015.) **sheds light on the history of *Livistona mariae* (right)**, an endemic species from central Australia, which is isolated by some 1000 km from its nearest relative, *L. rigida* of northern Australia. Botanists long assumed that *L. mariae* became isolated as Australia became more arid in the mid-Miocene (15 million years ago), but molecular analysis by T. Kondo et al. (Proceedings of the Royal Society, B. 279: 2652–2661. 2012.) estimated the divergence between the two species to have occurred only 15,000 years ago, a period which overlaps with the time of human occupation. Kondo et al. could not rule out the possibility that the ancestors of what would become *L. mariae* were brought by humans from the populations of *L. rigida* in the north. Bowman et al. brought to light a recently translated text written by a German anthropologist and missionary, Carl Strehlow, in 1895. Strehlow noted the population of *L. mariae* and related the traditional Aboriginal legend that “the gods from the high north brought the seeds to this place a long time ago.” Aboriginal legend neatly coincides with estimates of molecular divergence time and gives further credence to the hypothesis that the ancestors to *L. mariae* were brought to central Australia by humans.



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Micropropagation of endangered species of palms continues to be a promising avenue of research and conservation. A recent paper by D.H. Tejavath et al. (International Journal of Current Microbiology and Applied Sciences 4: 436–440. 2015) described a technique for regenerating plantlets of the rare palm, *Calamus wightii* (under the synonym *C. huegelianus*), a species endemic to the Western Ghats of India. In trials of two media and various combinations of growth regulators and hormones, the authors were able to identify the best medium for this species of rattan.

Betel nut, the seed of *Areca catechu*, is a wildly popular masticatory in parts of east Africa, Asia and the Pacific. Chewing betel nut releases an alkaloid, arecoline, which acts as a stimulant, but physicians have long known of the dark side of betel nut: it is a significant cause of oral cancers. **The government of Taiwan is offering subsidies to farmers to cut down their betel nut palms** in order to reduce the domestic supply and discourage the cancer-causing habit. India and Thailand have also launched campaigns to discourage betel nut use and reduce the rate of oral cancers.

Earlier this year, the palm world was **saddened to learn of the passing of Dr. Hermilo J. Quero Rico**. Quero had a long career working with the palm flora of Mexico and described several new species, including *Brahea sarukhanii* and *Gaussia gomez-pompae*. He will be remembered for his love of palms, his country and his home state of Quintana Roo.