Jean-Christophe Pintaud (1960–2015)

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"Death is a thief," as the African proverb says. Just last year, death stole one of the most eminent palm scientists, Jean-Christophe Pintaud, researcher at the Institute de "Recherche pour le Développement" (IRD). JCP, as he was affectionately called, was a palm-lover ever since he was a boy, when he used to sell seeds of *Washingtonia robusta* to make some extra pocket money. His love of palms was contagious, spreading quickly to people who took the time to listen to him, from students to scientists. Jean-Christophe had me hooked on palms after our first meeting back in 2001. He was what I call a true naturalist, a rare breed of person nowadays who has an encyclopedic knowledge of the natural world from botany to astronomy. Jean-Christophe had an acute sense of observation, a vital quality for a palm researcher, in my view. He knew palms inside out, from the ecosystem they lived in to the DNA molecules that made them. He was also very much involved in getting palm people from different fields to work together, being one of the founders of the

European Network of Palms Specialists (EUNOPS) that has met every year for the past 14 years.

Jean-Christophe undertook his university studies first at the de Université de Nice-Sophia Antipolis in southern France, then at the Université de Toulouse and finally at the Universities of Paris-Jussieu et Paris-Orsay where he graduated in Ecology in 1993. During his masters, he studied the ecology of palms in the far away and isolated island of New Caledonia where he spent four months in 1994. He then had the opportunity to return there as a Technical Volunteer between 1994 and 1996 where he continued his studies the ecology of New Caledonian palms. From 1996 to 1999 he undertook his PhD entitled "Phylogeny, biogeography and ecology of New Caledonian palms," for which he received great honors. This led to the publication of the important and still central piece of work "Palms of New Caledonia," co-authored with Don Hodel in 1998, in which they described five new species endemic to the island. During his post doctoral years he expanded his expertise by learning techniques of molecular biology at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (UK) and the University of Washington (US). It is during that time that he first travelled to Ecuador and discovered the huge diversity of Neotropical palms.

In 2000, Jean-Christophe was recruited at the IRD, where he, naturally, initiated a research program on Neotropical palms. He always took multidisciplinary approaches to the study of palms, using molecular biology, phylogeny, anatomy, phytochemistry and taxonomy to answer the questions at hand. He was mainly interested in understanding patterns in speciation across the region using large species complexes such as *Astrocaryum* or the subtribe Bactridinae as models. He lived in Ecuador from 2003 to 2007, where he undertook numerous field trips collecting and observing. These trips, of course, allowed him to gain an incredible and unique understanding of palm species of the region. He had a deep understanding of the taxonomy and ecology of complex palm genera such as *Astrocaryum*, *Attalea* and *Bactris*. In parallel, he was also interested in the economic value of palms and started programs on the origins of domestication and genetic dynamics of certain economically important species such as *Bactris gasipaes* (the only truly domesticated palm of the Neotropics), *Oenocarpus bataua, Euterpe edulis* and several *Ceroxylon* species. More recently he was involved in a new project looking at domestication genetics of the pacaya palm (*Chamaedorea tepejilote*). He was also deeply involved in understanding the genetic diversity and domestication origins of the date palm (*Phoenix dactyliefera*), and numerous subsequent publications have slowly unraveled the complex history of the important palm. His research in date palm genetics earned him the distinction of "Cavaliere delle Palme" in 2008 by the *Phoenix*-dominated town of San Remo in Italy. Finally, Jean-Christophe continued his long lasting interest in New Caledonian palms, undertaking more in depth phylogenetic studies mainly of the subtribe Archontophoenicinae.

The most striking aspect of JCP's research was his ability to build long lasting and solid collaborations with South American institutes in for example Colombia, Ecuador or Peru, as well as in other countries such as Algeria, Tunisia, Pakistan and Djibouti. He was appointed invited professor at the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador and honorary professor at the Universidad National Mayor San Marcos and Universidad Nacional Toribio Rodríguez de Mendoza, both in Peru.

His involvement with other institutes is reflected in the vast number of students he has trained and supervised, especially from South America, northern Africa, Pakistan and Europe. Most of these now have permanent positions in their universities or institutes of origin. Jean-Christophe has been a scientific mentor to many of the new generation of palm researchers, including myself, and his premature disappearance has robbed the next generation of palm students of his passion, skills and kindness. Jean-Christophe described himself recently as a "fous de palmier," but I think he was more than that; he lived through palms. We lost a friend, a colleague and mentor, and he will be greatly missed.

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