

Nursery Owner and Friends Rescue Palms from Grim Future

-- New South Wales

by Benjamin Smith, edited by Brad McCarson

Most palms existing in older gardens can face a future of uncertainty. Many properties must be cleared for construction or infrastructure purposes, leaving palms bulldozed over or sent to the chipper. Colin Wilson, Margaret Kraa, and I have rescued some magnificent and rare specimens from this fate.

After a tip off from a local fellow nursery operator I went to investigate a block of land not far from my house; the land had been sold and everything on the land including the existing house and gardens had its days numbered. At some stage in the very near future the bulldozers and giant mulching machines would be moving in and the land would be cleared for many smaller residential dwellings.

Margaret told me that there were quite a few large rare palms on the block and mentioned that the previous owner was happy to have them removed if anyone was interested in them. My curiosity got the better of me and I stopped in for a look around. As soon as I entered the property I was faced with three large, robust and beautiful *Dypsis decipiens*. All had two twin stems. "WOW!" I thought to myself. I walked around some more and found many old established rare palms, including two *Ravenea xerophila* and a large *Coccothrinax crinita*.



Discovered at site: a magnificent Dypsis decipiens followed by a Coccothrinax crinita

Continued next page

The *R. xerophyllia* was something that I could dig with relative ease and would be a nice addition to our nursery stock, but the rest were just too big. I thought what a shame to see these old rare palms turned into mulch!

My friend and colleague, Colin who lives 1000km (621 miles) away has very close associations with both the Royal Botanic Gardens & Domain Trust, Sydney and Wollongong Botanic Garden. Colin had already been tipped off about the existence of these palms and had some interest in them but the distance between him and the palms was difficult for him to overcome. At the annual Palm and Cycad Society meeting I spoke to Colin about his interest in acquiring the palms for his botanical garden projects. I offered my assistance in trying to facilitate the operation of removing the palms from their current location and getting them over to Wollongong.

Colin has donated over 3000 palms and over 400 species to various botanical gardens and said he would finance the removal and transport of the palms. He's helped preserve many palm species and has even been presented a plaque of recognition for his work. I knew these palms were in good hands.

Searching for help in extracting the palms, I luckily found an associate who could remove and haul the palms away for us. While the extraction and potting of the plants was smooth sailing, I was about to encounter a bit of a head wind, the problem being that the property, and therefore the palms, were in a high risk fire ant zone. The removal of soil from the property was highly restricted. Moving the plants to their new home in another state meant that strict regulations needed to be met.

The plants (mainly soil) are required to be drenched by a solution of chlorpyrifos under the supervision of the Department of Primary Industries personnel. Based on any drenching I have done previously I realised that our drenching equipment was much too small for the job and the supervision cost was going to run into thousands of dollars. I had a great handyman on our nursery team so I quickly gave him a call. On his day off my staff member Shane spent a great deal of time building a new machine out of whatever he had lying around. The next day came and I was apprehensive, but all went smoothly and the required piece of paper for transporting the palms was in hand. I was really happy and relieved that everything was in order.



Dypsis decipiens loaded and waiting to be shipped to Colin in New South Wales, Australia; *Coccothrinax* at center packed and ready for loading.

A few days later the palms were loaded onto a truck and arrived at Colin's the next day. The plants were carefully unloaded under Colin's keen supervision and planted according to his design. The palms were saved and will now live a long and fruitful life at the Wollongong Botanic Garden in New South Wales, Australia.

To see photos of the palms arriving in Wollongong, [click HERE](#).

--The End

A Bus Ride in Singapore

by Felix F. Merklinger

Every morning I take the bus from where I live in Singapore, a neighbourhood called Dairy Farm, and embark on a journey of approximately 30 minutes along Upper Bukit Timah road, before arriving at my office at the Singapore Botanic Gardens. Along the way I take the opportunity to admire the palms, which line the busy road and spill out of private gardens and condominiums. During this journey, 30 genera of palms can be seen!

On the bus I manage to find a seat next to a fellow passenger, totally oblivious to his surroundings while deeply immersed in a mobile phone game. Turning away the blast of cold air from the air-conditioning outlet I look through the window covered in condensation and the first thing I see is a palm. It is the Macarthur palm, *Ptychosperma macarthurii*. It lines almost the entire stretch of Upper Bukit Timah road, growing in dense stands and separating the two opposing lanes; it occupies corners in



private gardens and seedlings of it can sometimes even be seen growing epiphytically on *Khaya senegalensis*, its seeds being a well-liked addition to the diet of local birds.

As the bus moves ahead, past the Old Ford Factory (where Allied Troops surrendered to the Japanese in WWII), the crowns of Oil palms (*Elaeis guineensis*) and Coconut palms (*Cocos nucifera*) become visible, emerging from the secondary vegetation along the old rail corridor and the Bukit Timah nature reserve. Oil palms used to be grown as ornamentals before the oil palm “boom” turned it into an almost exclusively agricultural crop. Sometimes however, it is still planted for ornament here in Singapore, mostly in the older condominiums (“older” meaning approximately 30 years old). Like the Macarthur palms, oil palms are also popping up everywhere, demonstrating its ability to soon invade any green space available. Its fruits are eaten by squirrels, rats and birds especially the very common Mynah (*Acridotheres tristis*) is very partial to them.

Above: *Ptychosperma macarthurii* and *Saribus*

rotundifolia snapped
from the rolling bus by Felix Merklinger

The bus has now reached another stop just outside another condominium and in the short interlude while more passengers squeeze onto the vehicle I get a glimpse of the palms planted outside. The bus stop is surrounded by a sparse line of Teddy Bear palms, *Dypsis leptocheilos*. The dense, rust-brown indumentum on the leaf sheaths stubbornly shining through a dirty grey layer of car fume particles. In the background I can make out tall specimens of *Saribus rotundifolius*, a common palm throughout Southeast Asia, its leaves stiffer than those of *Livistona*, and with long panicles protruding out of the crown, bearing distinctive red fruits. The interior of the condominium is planted full of palms. Each ground floor apartment of the high rise buildings has been furnished with its own Betel Nut palm, *Areca catechu* –people on the lowest two floors could just reach out the window and harvest their daily supply of betel nuts (if only it was still in fashion). The landscaped gardens include adult reproductive specimens of *Archontophoenix alexandrae*, *Cyrtostachys renda*, *Euterpe oleracea*, *Licuala grandis*, *Livistona chinensis*, *Phoenix roebelenii*, *Roystonea regia*, *Syagrus romanzoffiana* and *Wodyetia bifurcata*; while the entire gardens are fenced in by *Dypsis lutescens*. The car park of a shop on the opposite side of the road is lined with *Adonidia merrillii* and in another corner is a group of fruiting *Bismarckia nobilis*. Its entrance is gated by several imposing specimens of *Phoenix dactylifera*, flowering, although I have never seen them fruiting.

Continued next page

Because the bus is already moving again I have to turn around abruptly to make sure I don't miss any palms. By doing so I accidentally bump into my seat neighbour and for a brief moment he awakes from his mobile phone trance and gazes at me with drowsy eyes. I am sure I can see the reflection of a palm in his pupils so I quickly turn back and – yes! A row of *Carpentaria acuminata* and *Bentinckia nicobarica* have been planted along the BKE (PIE) highway bridge. The more robust *Bentinckia* are rising above the slender *Carpentaria* with their gracefully arching leaves. I notice *Rhapis excelsa* underneath the bridge, not exactly brightening up the space but at least hiding some of the not so beautiful concrete with its dark foliage. This



Clockwise from top left: *Areca catechu*; *Bismarckia nobilis*; *Johannesteijsmannia magnifica* and *Phoenicophorium borsigianum*

palm is very commonly used all over Singapore, nearly always as a screen to the road or neighbouring gardens for which, of course, it is perfectly suitable.

As we are drawing closer to the end of my bus journey, the roadside vegetation mainly composed of various trees and shrubs, becomes broader and creates a lot of shade. Some self-sown specimens of *Caryota mitis*, the local fishtail palm, are also present. This would just be perfect for some understory palms. And indeed, I can make out a few small specimens of *Arenga hookeriana* and several specimens of the Asian palm jewel, *Johannesteijsmannia magnifica*. Somehow, a single specimen of *Phoenicophorium borsigianum* has also found its way into this randomly composed planting in the middle of the hectic Bukit Timah road.

The last stretch covered brings us past some elegant houses, each with a small garden out front. Those who have not paved it into a car park/patio have often had enough wit about them to plant some palms. There are some large *Rhopaloblaste ceramica*, several individuals of *Washingtonia robusta* (much nicer specimens than the Singapore Botanic Gardens has, with their 'skirt' of dead leaves still present), *Pritchardia thurstonii*, *Copernicia prunifera* and a single plant of *Hyophorbe lagenicaulis*, the bottle palm. One "older" house even has the regional *Oncosperma tigillarum* in its garden, also called the Nibung palm. Given its spiny appearance, I assume no children live in that house!

Continued next page



Left to right: *Arenga hookeriana*; *Cyrtostachys renda* with *Washingtonia robusta*; *Elaeis guineensis*; *Oncosperma tigillarum* snapped from the moving bus by Felix Merklinger

When I am about to arrive at my final destination, I have to squeeze past the man on the mobile phone who has barely looked up once, and I feel like telling him that he just missed 29 genera of palms. But descending from the bus, my attention is drawn to a clump of *Wodyetia* palms outside and I realise that someone confused two similar looking palms and included two specimens of *Normanbya normanbyi* into this clump of Foxtails. Even before arriving at the botanic gardens, I have already seen 30 genera of palms (a ratio of one palm genus per minute and a third of the collections at SBG), in just one road stretch in Singapore!

--The End

Scroll to the next page for the stunning August Palm Photo!

Is your IPS membership up to date? Visit www.palms.org and renew your membership.

Drool-worthy: The August Palm Photo



Licuala peltata var. *sumawongii* in the Charmin Akina Garden on the Island of Hawaii. Photo taken by Bo-Göran Lundkvist during a Hawaii Island Palm Society tour, June 28, 2015.

Do you have a fabulous drool-worthy palm photo? Submit photos to be considered for publication to: kimberley.b.cyr@gmail.com Photos must be your own original work.

SHARE THE EXCITEMENT OF PALMS -- FORWARD THIS NEWSLETTER TO A FRIEND!

To unsubscribe, email info@palms.org