

Palm Pilgrimage Edition

Today is International Palm Day

A consortium of palm botanists and conservationists created **International Palm Day** (IPD) to honor Carl Friedrich Philipp von Martius, Professor of Botany and director of the Royal Botanic Garden in Munich. The date chosen was Martius' birthday, April 17 (1794).

April 17 also happens to be the anniversary of the International Palm Society's first meeting in 1956.

Let the celebrations begin!



*Palm Sign 2010 by
Yto Barrada at Tate
Modern, London.*

Indian Ocean Palm Odyssey

Seychelles

Danish taxonomist Frederik Marcus Knuth (the 9th Count of Knuthenborg) voyaged to Seychelles in 1962 and his account of this visit in *Principes* represents the first article ever devoted to these islands in our journal. At that time the Count enthusiastically recommended reaching the islands via a one-week steamboat voyage on the British India Line (Bombay to Mombasa-South Africa), and arranging a special stop over in Mahé. Count Frederik's bounty included "impressive quantities of heavy (i.e., fresh) seed nuts ready to be shipped to botanical gardens" of his choosing. [*Principes* 7: 46. 1963]

In the spring of 1970, Society member Mrs. M. Hubert Hilder and her husband sailed from Mombasa, Africa aboard *MS Explorer* to collect seed. They brought home to St. Croix "the best nut anyone had seen." Mrs. Hilder went on to write: "Fortunately the 25-lb. nut did not hit us as it rolled around in the cabin on occasional rough days."

That summer (1970), IPS member June Bremerman and her new husband, Mr. Rex Misner, booked a honeymoon cruise on the same ship. They obtained ten *Lodoicea* nuts, despite being stricken with para-typhoid! In her telephone communication with IPS headquarters back then, Mrs. Bremerman exclaimed: "Six of the seeds were purloined and eaten by members of the crew. After many delays and misadventures the remaining four arrived in Naples, Florida, at a cost of well over \$100.00 per nut. Let us pray that they survive!" [*Principes* 15: 141. 1970]

After two unsuccessful attempts (airline cancellations and later, Covid), your editor finally realized a lifelong dream and made it to the smallest nation in Africa, Seychelles. Truth be told, my initial interest in Seychelles was sparked by *Sports Illustrated* magazine from February 5, 1979 (look it up). However, over the past several decades it was the siren song of six endemic palm genera that drew me here. Finally, the time had arrived for my very own palm pilgrimage.

First sighting of Praslin Island!





Praslin Island Airport (PRI), has received countless palmophiles over the years.

Independence Day Monument erected on 29th June 1976. It features the Coco de Mer nut and male catkin (along with painted vanilla leaves and pods).



Great timing!

Vallée de Mai Nature Reserve



Yes, this UNESCO (1983) world heritage site has been referred to as the Garden of Eden. Or as Michael Lock proclaimed, “the palmiest place on earth.” All six endemic palm species are plentiful here. Especially startling are the hundreds *Lodoicea maldivica* seeds, basically in every sight line throughout the reserve.

Incoming IPS Director Jason Dewees strongly recommended a local guide named Dora. Despite our best efforts, we were totally unable to contact her. But, of course, our driver knew her (it’s a small island), and there she was patiently waiting for us at the gate. She is absolutely terrific, both in terms of flora as well as fauna. Dora has given me permission to publish her email address: dorastourguide@gmail.com.

Among an amazing array of local knowledge, Dora told us *Lodoicea maldivica* seeds are available to residents of Praslin at a cost of 500 Seychellois Rupees (about \$37 USD). Further, employees of Vallée de Mai will come to their homes to supervise planting in their gardens.



The entrance structure is thatched with *Verschaffeltia splendida*.



Arlene at the precipice of the stairway to heaven!

The perfect leaf of the palm world's cause célèbre, *Lodoicea maldivica* (Coco de Mer or CDM).





A female CDM holding an abundant crop of fruit. Photo by Michael Lock.

The rachilla bearing male flowers. The odor of the sticky pollen bears a resemblance to popcorn.



A very large nut.





Dora and her “husband,” the oldest CDM in the park. Its age is estimated at over two centuries, and its height is greater than 30 meters.

Below, left and right: *Roscheria melanochaetes* (Lattanyen Oban), perhaps the least-sighted of the six endemic genera.





A young *Nephrosperma vanhoutteanum* (Lattanyen Milpat) with white spines.

The leaflets of *Nephrosperma vanhoutteanum* undulate in the breeze, not unlike the undulating gait of a millipede, hence the moniker "Milpat."

Below, left and right: A fetching emergent peach-colored leaf of *Verschaffeltia splendida* (Latannyen Lat) and a thicket of prominent stilt roots.





One of the few non-palms seen in the Vallée de Mai Nature Reserve, the Seychelles screw pine, *Pandanus sechellarum*. Note the exceptionally long stilt roots.



Basking in the glory of a memorable morning at the Vallée de Mai Nature Reserve, and looking forward to our next stop, the Fond Ferdinand Nature Reserve.

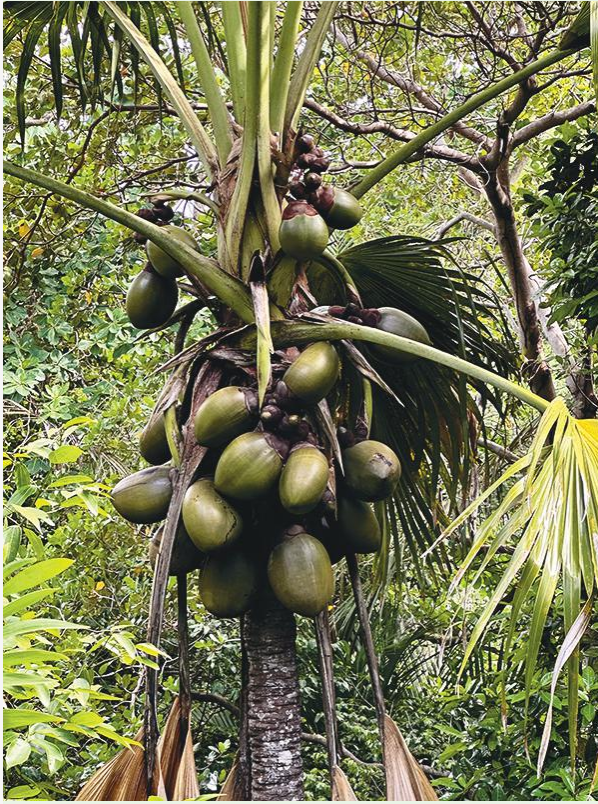


Fond Ferdinand Nature Reserve and National Park

Fond Ferdinand is more than six times larger than Vallée de Mai and is quite different in terms of topography. As well it is less commercial, and there are fewer people (we did not see anyone else on our hike). But it is equally spectacular.

Interesting it appeared that the petioles of the CDMs here were much more noticeably elongated.





Top, left: A female Coco de Mer festooned with fruits, in the forest at Fond Ferdinand.



Top, right: A *Phoenicophorium borsigianum* (Latannyen Fey) blooming at the Fond Ferdinand trail-head, photo by Michael Lock.

Right: *Deckenia nobilis* (Palmiste) literally covering the mountainside.





Deckenia nobilis has a purplish crownshaft and spines on the lower part of the trunk. The peduncular bract that encloses the inflorescence is termed the "prickly purse."



Travel with the International Palm Society

A happy coincidence: the IPS travels to locations that also offer great birding, scuba, golf and tennis. There's always time for other hobbies, and this is another reason why members should never miss an opportunity to travel with us!



The Black Parrot or Perroquet noir (above) is the national bird of Seychelles. Seen here foraging in an Acacia tree at Fond Ferdinand. During mating season, signs are posted throughout the parks admonishing people not to whistle, which could confuse the birds. Photo by Michael Lock.



A Seychelles Blue Pigeon (right) perched on the inflorescence of a *Nephrosperma vanhoutteanum* palm, Glacis Noire Nature Trail, Praslin Island. Photo and caption by Michael Lock.



Upcoming Travel with the IPS

The International Palm Society's
33rd biennial: New Caledonia

Pre-Tour:
September 21, 2024
Sold out

Board of Directors meeting:
September 22, 2024 (Sunday)

Biennial:
Arrive September 22, 2024
Depart September 30, 2024
Sold out

Post-tour:
October 1-4, 2024
registration now open



Parting Shots

It was hard to leave this magical place. The minuscule departure lounge at PRI barely held the 12 members of the society, all surprised to see each other unannounced, for consecutive flights. True palm karma. However spirits were buoyed by airport shopping in Mahé (SEZ) en route to our much anticipated mini-biennial in La Réunion (which IPS subscription members can read about in an upcoming edition of our journal *Palms*)



Suchen Marcus, Arlene Hurwitz and Cindy Andersen (Jerry Andersen in background and Jeff Marcus just off screen) showing off recent acquisitions at the departure gate, SEZ.

