

PALM LITERATURE

PALMERAS. By Jose Antonio del Cañizo. Spanish text. Ediciones Mundiprensa, Madrid. 2002. ISBN: 84-7114-989-3. 68 Euros, hard-bound. 709 pp., 650 pictures and 80 drawings.

There are very few books on palms in Spanish and most of them are small and on specific subjects, and some of them are translated from English. Here, for the first time, is a high quality, hefty, general book on palms produced in Spanish. This new book is not only a great synopsis of the world of palms, valid at the international level, but is also a window into Spain, a palm-growing country of warm Europe, which is surprising the world with its palm potential. There are also many pictures and references about Latin American botanical gardens.

The author is one of the personalities of the Spanish palm world and has fostered the growing interest in palms in his country. He is the director of the botanical gardens Parque de La Concepción, in Malaga, in the warmest part of Spain, and in 2002 was elected to the Board of Directors of the IPS.

His sense of humor is sprinkled all over the pages of this new book, making reading more enjoyable yet still technically useful. To cite an example, his unique page of palm "records" reports, besides the usual records such as the largest seed or the smallest leaf, the record of climbing coconut trees bare-footed, and the record of a man remaining longer than anybody else at the top of a palm.

Pictures are abundant and well-used. Not always spectacular, they still describe well the right palm in the right place, with many photographs taken in natural habitats as well as adult, healthy specimens in great gardens. In many cases, the place where the picture is taken is specified. Besides pictures of living palms and some line drawings, there are also pictures of old paintings, coins and even color covers of the journal PALMS.

The book is thankfully up to date, as is shown by the many references in the text to recent issues of our journal, PALMS. Even the recent palm phylogeny obtained by Lewis, Baker and Asmussen from DNA and its resulting new systematic order are reported. All the scientific names are correctly spelled and written with their authors. The description of each genus always contains a summary of its taxonomic position within the family

The first part of the book (160 pages) gives a broad general view of palms, their uses, landscaping, history, cultivation, morphology and systematics, diseases, pruning, transplanting and other aspects.

The main part of the book consists of species accounts. The 300 species treated are neatly divided in three sections: palms with palmate leaves, palms with pinnate leaves and crownshafts and palms with pinnate leaves without crownshafts. Within each section, genera are arranged alphabetically. There are abundant illustrations.

Each species account usually consists of a list of synonyms and vernacular names followed by various paragraphs on origin, ecology and general aspect. There is a basic and clear paragraph on "Habitat and use in gardens." It may mention a list of places in the world where one can find mature groups or avenues of large size and often gives data about their history and age – this is particularly large in the account of *Jubaea chilensis*. The last paragraph of each species account is a very welcome one. "Morphological Details," printed in smaller font, is the most technical part, which the interested reader will use when the book is used for identifying species. Additional paragraphs are provided in some species accounts, such as is the case of Palm Honey in the large account of *Phoenix canariensis*. The paragraph "Habitat and use in gardens" is maybe too basic. Now we know climatological data for the habitats of many palms. Reading data about rainfall, temperature and soils in habitat would have been a delight for the palm scientist and a powerful hint for the palm grower who would have been able to "learn from the habitat."

The last part of the book is a series of lists "to choose palms," for their resistance to shade, cold, drought, salt and other factors. There is also a glossary, an analytical index, some lists of "useful palm addresses" and a 9-page list of palm bibliography used, which – I have to say – is not always well referenced within text of the book.

I have to advise the readers that not all the 300 species are equally treated. About a third of them have very sparse information. Some species are simply mentioned and only five or six lines are written about *Caryota ochlandra*, *Archontophoenix maxima*, *Pseudophoenix lediniana* and *Calyptronoma plumeriana*. Thankfully some of them are illustrated by pictures. An important genus such as *Ceroxylon* is represented by only one species in this book (*Ceroxylon quindiuense*). On the other hand, we must consider that the book is thick enough (700 pages!) and no more information could be stuffed into it, so these thinner accounts can be intended as a way to make readers beg for more.

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