

PALM LITERATURE

GUIDE TO ENDEMIC PALMS AND SCREW PINES OF THE SEYCHELLES GRANITIC ISLANDS. Denis Matatiken & Didier Dogley. Plant Conservation Action, P.O. Box 392, Victoria, Mahé, Seychelles [boga@seychelles.net]. 2005. ISBN 99931-70-01-1. Price unknown. Softcover. Pp. 45.

On a per square kilometer basis, the Seychelles must have highest rate of endemism in the world for palm genera. This archipelago in the Indian Ocean has only 455 km² of land (and some of that is coral atoll), but it is home to six endemic genera. That is about one endemic genus for every 75 km². Nowhere else in the world can you find that level of palm generic diversity, and for that reason alone, the Seychelles figure prominently in the minds of palm lovers. The six genera, all monotypic, are well known to palm growers: *Deckenia*, *Lodoicea*, *Nephrosperma*, *Phoenicophorium*, *Roscheria*, and *Verschaffeltia*. These palm genera are some of the most distinctive palms in the world, so a guide book devoted to these six palms is most welcome.

The authors, working with the local non-governmental Plant Conservation Action group, have produced an informative and attractive small guide book to the native palms and pandans (screw pines) of the Mahé Group of islands, which are granitic in origin, as opposed to the elevated coral atolls that make up some of the smaller islands in the archipelago. The book is paper-bound and stapled. The image quality is good, and the layout is attractive. A brief glossary and list of references are provided at the end of the book.

The first half of the book is devoted to palms. There is a very brief introduction to the family on a worldwide basis, along with an introduction to the Seychelles endemics. Locality information is given for the palms, so that visitors could easily plan a palm-spotting itinerary with this guide book. Special attention is devoted to the most famous palm of the islands, *Lodoicea maldivica*.

The second half of the book is especially welcome: a guide to the pandans of the islands. *Pandanus* and its relatives are striking plants of the tropics, with unusual growth forms, attractive foliage, large flower clusters and bulky fruits. In many ways, they are like palms, although they are not close relations. Like palms, they can be difficult to study and,

consequently, they are not as well known as they should be. Checklists and floristic studies of pandans are rare. Illustrated field guides to pandans are unheard of. In fact, this may well be the first of the genre. In what other book could you find eight color photos of *Pandanus multispicatus*?

This book gives pandans and palms equal treatment. For each species, the authors provide common names (in French, Creole and English), habitat and distribution, a description of growth form of the leaves, flowers and fruits and a summary of past and present uses. The photographs illustrate distinctive features of each plant, from stilt roots to trunk spines to new leaf color. The photographs are so abundant and clear that the text almost becomes inconsequential. This book is worth seeking out just for the pictures.

I have only two technical criticisms of this book. The authorities for the scientific names of the plants are cited in the zoological rather than the botanical style, a small mistake betraying the zoological background of the authors. The other mistake – more serious, to be sure – is the error in pandan taxonomy. A recent study of the Pandanaceae concluded that a group of pandans from Madagascar and the Seychelles belongs to a new genus, *Martellidendron*, which is more closely related to *Freycinetia* than it is to *Pandanus* (Callmander et al. 2003). Users of this guide book will want to pencil in the name *Martellidendron hornei* (Balf. f.) Callm. & Chassot for the species on page 34. It is regrettable that Matatiken and Dogley did not include this new development in Pandanaceae systematics, as it points to a biogeographical relationship between the Seychelles and Madagascar that is not addressed by the guide book.

This book is an excellent guide to the palms and pandans of the Seychelles, and it will surely spark an interest in those plants in anyone traveling to the islands.

LITERATURE CITED

- CALLMANDER, M.W., P. CHASSOT, P. KÜPFER AND P. LOWRY II. 2003. Recognition of *Martellidendron*, a new genus of Pandanaceae, and its biogeographic implications. *Taxon* 52: 747–762.

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