

Chamaerops



46

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Cover: Washingtonia robusta at the World Financial Center in New York City, USA. See Editorial on page 4.

Photo: Tobias W. Spanner.

Chamaerops is the quarterly journal of The European Palm Society. The European Palm Society (EPS) is affiliated to the International Palm Society and was founded in 1991. The EPS is a nonprofit organization dedicated to sharing information about palms and other exotic plants across the continent of Europe. The main goal of the EPS is to communicate with other enthusiasts through Chamaerops, the EPS website, or personally at Society meetings, in order to share ideas and knowledge of the successful cultivation of exotic plants. Above all, the EPS and Chamaerops are run by members, for members.

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Editorial

On a recent trip to New York City, I had the chance to visit the site of the World Trade Center disaster. I had been up on top of one of the twin towers only a couple of years before, to enjoy the impressive view over the greatest city on Earth; now there was nothing but a gigantic hole in the ground. To my surprise, most buildings around the immediate site had already been restored completely; only on a few was there still damage visible, caused by the falling debris of the WTC. Apparently a lot of the glass on the World Financial Center, including that of a glasshouse between two of the buildings, was severely damaged. I had recently seen a short article in one of the many palm magazines I get (unfortunately I have not been able to find it again), where the author talked about the palms that were housed in this glasshouse at the WFC and their destruction in the course of the 9/11 events. I am happy to report that the palms are back! In the center of the courtyard stand sixteen tall, perfect *Washingtonia robusta*, all the same size. As you can see from the cover of this issue, these palms in this amazing setting present a very impressive sight. I was informed that the original plants had, in fact, been so severely damaged by falling glass that they had to be replaced.

The glasshouse at the WFC with its palms is, for me, a perfect example of how palms CAN be used in indoor landscaping even in a very formal and elegant setting. Those who claim that palms make places look like cheap holiday resorts need

only glance at the cover of this issue to see that this need not be the case. Palms make an immensely stronger statement than the mostly boring plants normally used in such a setting. I believe this kind of display, especially when staged in as prominent a place as the WFC, is so important for palms if they are to appear in the public eye as more than just props in a lovely Hawaii-style backdrop, complete with romantic sunset. Palms can, in fact, be used in serious and even formal landscaping. My wish is that indoor landscapers would have just a little more imagination, as demonstrated in this impressive example, and that they would learn a little more about the enormous potential of exotic plants instead of constantly resorting to the revoltingly dull and common *Ficus* etc. My apologies to any *Ficus* fans, but aren't most of them just tropical weeds? I would be very happy to hear from any of you about other such applications of palms or exotic plants in indoor landscaping, perhaps for a special feature in a future issue.

As I write this editorial for issue 46, we already have enough articles to fill *Chamaerops* 47 and have started editing. The first articles for issue 48 have come in as well, and if we receive more material at the current rate, I am hopeful we will be able to get 48 out to you in a few weeks. If new material continues to come in steadily, *Chamaerops* should soon be up-to-date. I hope you will enjoy this issue.

T.S.



Road to Rio - Part 2

By Martin Gibbons, The Palm Centre, UK

Christmas 2000. Brian Trollip and I were in Brazil, following in the steps of other palm enthusiasts. We had travelled north west into the interior from Rio de Janeiro, and had been rewarded with the sight of many rare and unusual palms. As we headed north we came across the main west-east highway and turned right, heading for Salvador and the coast a couple of hundred miles distant.....

The sky was blue, the weather clear and very warm, we had a good number of palms 'under our belt' and were excited by the prospect of seeing many more different species as the landscape changed and we sped east. *Syagrus coronata* seemed to be the most common big palm of the entire trip, distinctive with its great triangular leaf-boss, curiously twisted in a gentle spiral and supporting old leaf bases like spines on the back of some prehistoric lizard. The marble-sized, orange-red fruits are generously produced, often at eye-level, and we soon collected a few thousand from a garden, with the permission of the owner. It was extremely hot at this time and we were glad to get back to the shelter of our air-conditioned car.

From Ferio do Santana, we took the road to Santa Amoro, an old town with not much to recommend it, then sped east towards the city of Salvador and the Atlantic coast. The landscape changed with the miles and became flat and green. We saw a good number of *Polyandrococos caudescens* with their silver-backed leaves and characteristic new leaf spears with diagonal banding in green and silver. The fruits are curious, like big corns-on-the-cob, pendulous and

sometimes twisted. Here we also saw spiny *Acrocomia aculeata*, *Attalea* sp., and outside a garage in the city, *Syagrus botryophora*, seeds of which we were pleased to collect.

Salvador itself is a fine old city with much Portuguese colonial architecture, cathedrals and churches, however, it seems very short of hotels and we had to leave the city and head south to try to find somewhere to stay for the night. After quite a long drive we ended up at a crowded beach resort, Praia do Forte, where we found a small, beach-side pension and enjoyed an excellent meal of locally caught fish, before settling down for the night listening to the ocean's roar.

While we were trying to find the hotel we had caught sight of a colony of *Allagoptera brevicealyx* but it was too dark to examine them properly. Thus, the next morning, we set off back up the road to check them out. This entire stretch of the coast comprises one massive building site. We drove past mile after mile of roadworks, and extensive hotel, motel and 'gated community' development will change its character forever. We found our plants, thousands of them; there was no seed, alas, but it was good to see them all the same. We wondered how many other colonies of palms had been destroyed during the 'development'. We also saw and photographed *Attalea funifera* with its large, egg-sized, pointed fruits.

Finally, after checking for other species we found ourselves back in Salvador and, using the compass to navigate, and more by luck than by judgement, we located the ferry which takes cars and foot passengers across the narrow strait to the island of Itaparica, in effect a circular short cut from the tip of the peninsular back to the mainland.

Polyandrococos caudescens left standing in a pasture after forest has been cleared.

Photo: Martin Gibbons and Brian Trollip



The ferry was hot and overcrowded, full of sweaty people (not least ourselves). There was little breeze as the old ship chugged across the strait and we thought of those single-paragraph news reports that one reads about ferries sinking in distant parts of the world. However, we arrived without incident and still in one piece. The journey took about an hour, then we drove a further half hour across the island, then over a modern bridge which connects the island with the mainland at the town of Vera Cruz.

Heading west, after about 15kms we saw the first of many *Syagrus botryophora* that we were to see, handsome tall trees, many in ripe fruit but all out of reach of our 24 foot (8m) long collecting pole. The answer was to lash the saw pole to a cut down sapling with gaffer tape which gave us an extra 8 or 9 feet. In this way we managed to collect a good number of seed though the physical effort involved in controlling the pole which, at that length, seems to have a mind of its own, was enormous and time consuming. We also saw *Bactris* species, more *Polyandrococos* and, one we were especially happy to see, *Desmoncus orthacanthos*, an unusual climbing palm with a prominent central vein in the leaf, and which supports itself on its upward climb through the trees with backward facing spines.

By this time it was getting dark and time to find somewhere to stay. We drove down towards the town of Santo Antonio do Jesus and checked in at a gloomy, Bates-Motel style place, run by an ancient crone and her simple-minded daughter. It was a bit creepy but we were so tired after our exertions that we slept like logs. In the sunny morning we drove on into the town proper and found a nice café for breakfast and a 'Posto Telefonico' to make phone calls, check emails and post cards home, then headed back to the main road and turned south, direction Ilheus, pronounced 'eel-use'.

The landscape was dominated by an abundance of oil palms (*Elaeis oleifera*), and along the way

On the verge of extinction: Syagrus macrocarpa.
Photo: Martin Gibbons and Brian Trollip

we also spotted a few *Bactris ferrugina* growing alongside the road. The plants were quite tall and again we needed the collecting pole to harvest some seeds, of which there were thousands. Growing with the *Bactris* was another *Desmoncus* species, again easily recognizable by the central leaf vein. This one was low and bushy probably because there were no nearby trees for it to climb into. Further down the road we saw a number of *Raphia australis* with their distinctive orange petioles. They were all in fruit.

We stopped at a wonderful country-club style restaurant for lunch where, curiously, the buffet lunch was charged for by weight. Our steaks were heavy, but delicious. We then carried on south, down towards Ilheus and saw several more occurrences of *S. botryophora* among which several trees had been cut down, perhaps for heart of palm. It is always a sad sight to see a palm that has been cut down, in this case especially so, the palms are beautiful and not at all common and to us it seems like wanton vandalism.

We drove past a hillside covered with trees heavy with purple flowers, a beautiful sight indeed in the bright sunlight and as we entered Ilheus we passed what seemed to be a palm-collector's garden, with *Royals*, *Aiphanes*, *Livistona* and other exotic palms growing in happy abandon.

Tonight was December 31st and we found a nice friendly hotel ('Hotel Atlantico Sul') in Ilheus. At an open-air bar in the middle of the bay we later had beers and watched the celebratory firework display across the water, amid the noisy jubilation of the locals, an excellent way to see in the New Year.

We decided to stay in the same hotel for a second night as we desperately needed to spend a day cleaning the seeds that we had collected. For this cleaning and drying process one needs a clean, flat, sunny and hot surface. We set off in the car and eventually found such a place. The coast here is all white sandy beaches but while thousands of people were enjoying their public holiday frolicking in the sea, we spent the day cleaning,

cleaning, cleaning all the seeds, then spreading them out to dry off a bit in the sun, on a disused road behind one of the beaches. We collected a number of curious onlookers who really could not understand what we were doing and our Portuguese - though considerably better than it had been when we arrived - was not up to explaining. They probably thought, 'El Englatares es muito loco'. Boy, was it hot!

The following day we left the friendly hotel and headed south in the direction of Espirito Santo. Along the way, a number of *Polyandrococos caudescens* were to be seen, many with great bunches of unripe fruit. We also spotted stands of *Syagrus botryophora* along the highway. Some carried ripe yellow fruits so we decided to put the pole saw into action and had soon collected a few hundred seeds. We also collected many cuts from the sharp-edged saw grass which was growing around them. That night we stayed in a 'tres estrellas' hotel in the town of Teixeira de Freitas where we tucked into a huge local meal of steak, bacon, ham and parmesan cheese, all gloriously combined to form a delightful meal.

Next morning we decided we really needed to clean some more seeds. Accordingly we looked for a suitable roadside spot as we drove south, crossing the state border into Espirito Santo, and were soon lucky enough to find the ideal location where a water spout jutted out at the side of the road into a stone basin. Running water is a bonus when cleaning seeds! We worked away for a couple of hours when some street kids sidled up to see what we were doing. Soon we had a small team helping us and they stayed all day, finally helping us pack up. We sent them on their way with R\$25 apiece, a bit generous, but they had worked hard and earned every cent. We spent that night at the Park Hotel in Inhares, recovering from the heat and work of the day with a few welcome beers.

After leaving the hotel we carried on driving south, parallel with the coast, and about 30kms before Aracruz spotted a strange but beautiful *Syagrus* species growing in a garden and a little further along came across a stand of 5 more trees,

some heavy with large fruit. We realized with awe that we were looking at the elusive *Syagrus macrocarpa*, believed by some to be almost extinct. We reflected on the fact that these few trees produce thousands of seeds every year yet there was not a single young plant to be seen anywhere. Whether the locals eat the seeds, or grazing animals eat the seedlings we did not know, but either way it seemed terribly sad that Nature was doing her level best to keep this species going while man was doing nothing to help. The seeds we collected we later distributed all around the globe. At least this elegant palm may survive in cultivation.

We later saw a very few isolated further specimens in remnant patches of forest, but mostly this has all been cleared for farmland, along with all and any palms that have been growing in it for hundreds of thousands of years.

Rio Bonito ('Beautiful River') was our destination that night and we found a nice hotel and, after wandering the streets for an hour, a reasonable restaurant where we celebrated our exciting palm find with the local beer. Next day we found a roadside spot to clean more seeds and this time were surrounded by a veritable football team of young kids, all eager to make a buck. The work went well and we paid off our young helpers at the end of the day, returning to the same hotel in Rio Bonito for a second night.

And that was more or less the end of our trip to Brazil. More seed cleaning the next day, then a day spent as tourists in Rio de Janeiro, going by funicular railway up to the giant statue of Christ, whose outspread arms seem to encompass the entire city and which is the symbol of Brazil. An afternoon on Copacabana beach with the beautiful people and then we were off, back to chilly Europe with sun tans to remind us of the wonderful time we had had in this fascinating and friendly, palm-rich country.



Dr. Frankensteins Palms - Cold Hardy Hybrids

By Nigel Kembrey

I have been an exotic gardener for approaching 15 years, having been inspired by Richard Darlow's exotic garden, which appeared on *Gardener's World* one winter day. I have tried just about all of the available cold hardy palms, but the only two pinnate palms I can grow are *Butia* and *Jubaea*. *Butia* is a wonderful palm, but is slow, putting on about five leaves a year, whilst *Jubaea* (my favourite palm) as we all know puts on only two leaves a year in our climate and takes forever to reach any decent size. I have been aware of hybrid palms for some time but they never seem to be available. I don't know whether this is because the purists don't want to encourage them or simply because they are rare and unobtainable. They do seem to be available in the USA for those who want them, and there are large specimens dotted around both Europe and the USA.

We are fortunate that *Butia* is the nymphomaniac of the palm world, seeming to hybridise readily with other members of the *Butiinae* subtribe. There are several *Butia* hybrids available to the cold hardy palm grower, each with its own set of attributes. I am by no means an expert, but have been following developments in this field with interest, enabling me to provide an overview of the different hybrid varieties as follows.

Butia X *Jubaea* or *Jubaea* X *Butia*. Imagine a *Jubaea* sized palm that grows at *Butia* speed and is equally as cold hardy. This particular cross works both ways with either plant able to receive pollen from the other. It is generally thought that *Jubaea* X *Butia* is the more attractive palm. This is one of the earliest hybridisations to be successfully completed and there are several mature specimens

throughout the world. The plant varies but some of the better specimens tend to be *Jubaea* sized with recurved leaves but more importantly grow with vigour and are capable in a warm climate of producing seed after 15 years as opposed to 40 years for the true *Jubaea*. The seed from the *Jubaea* X *Butia* are viable and several palms throughout the world now produce F2 seed so the palms should become more readily available. The F2 seedlings tend to be quite variable. *Butia* X *Syagrus*. Also called *Butyagrus* or the Mule Palm. This palm grows very rapidly in a warm climate and can look incredibly beautiful. The growth habit varies considerably. The seed is sterile, hence the name Mule palm. Unfortunately the palm is a disappointment in cool climates, it proved like *Syagrus* to dislike our cool conditions and refused to grow. One development, though, is the discovery that Mule pollen is viable and this can be backcrossed with *Butia* to produce *Butia* X (*Butia* X *Syagrus*) and *Jubaea* X (*Butia* X *Syagrus*) also called X *Jubutyagrus*, the former will revert to a much more *Butia* like plant, but will hopefully retain some of the vigour and characteristics of the *Syagrus* whilst being more cool tolerant. There is one in Florida which Merrill Wilcox referred to as "surprisingly growing much more quickly than a dozen or so adjacent *Butyagrus*, but not such an attractive palm, and not as fast as *Jubutyagrus*". It is uncertain why these palms are faster than *Butyagrus*, there are many possible explanations, but the most likely is the fact that *Butyagrus* growth slows considerably in Florida in winter, whereas *Butias* and *Jubaeas* do not, so it is likely that the extra injection of *Butia* or *Jubaea* genes enables the plant to grow at lower temperatures which is very promising for those of us in a cool climate. It should be pointed out that results of this cross are likely to be very variable.



The Fall and Rise of an Exotic North Devon Garden

Butia X Parajubaea This is a recent hybridisation, with plants only becoming available for the first time in recent months. The earliest crosses have been made with *Parajubaea cocoides* as there are seemingly no *Parajubaea torallyi* in the USA capable of producing pollen. The seedlings display remarkable vigour and will become very impressive palms I am sure. With *Parajubaea* growing rapidly in cool conditions, this particular hybrid has incredible potential for our cool climate, with none of the drawbacks encountered with the *Butia X Syagrus*. The only remaining question is its hardiness; *Parajubaea cocoides* does not succeed where the temperatures fall much below -3°C and one wonders just how much extra hardiness the cross with *Butia* will impart. I am quite sure, however, that future crosses with *Parajubaea torallyi* will be much hardier and will prove a huge winner in our climate.

There are also further possibilities. I know that seed from a cross of *Butia X Allagoptera* has recently been collected, and with *Lytocaryum* and *Polyandrococos* also members of the *Butiinae* subtribe, I am sure that attempts will be made to hybridise these wonderful palms in the future, which may or may not be successful. All members of this family show some resistance to cold so the prospects are good. *Polyandrococos* is like a dainty *Ceroxylon* but unfortunately very rare. There is also the prospect of backcrossing the above hybrids against *Butia* or other *Butia* hybrids in many different combinations which may also produce some further exciting palms. Sooner or later if enough pollen is thrown at enough palms, maybe a super fast and super hardy pinnate palm could be created. I know that *Jubaea X Parajubaea* is to be attempted in the spring, possibly the most exciting of them all!

Left: *X Butyagrus nabonnandii* (*Butia capitata X Syagrus romanzoffiana*), originally donated to Huntington Garden in San Marino, California by Dr. Merrill Willcox.
Photo by John Strazicich.

Pages 12 and 13: Giants in pots: Southeast Growers Inc. in Wellington, Florida, who supplied the *Washingtonia robusta* for the WFC (see editorial), have one of the largest shadehouses in the U.S.A. Photo by Tobias W. Spanner

things grew very quickly. Thirteen years later, our new garden has an appearance of semi-maturity. Pines, cypress, and varieties of *Eucalyptus* are up to 40 ft. tall, *Acacia Dealbata* ('Mimosa'), is at 30 ft. and looks splendid when in flower in early

February. Numerous branching *Cordyline* are up to 15 ft., Bananas up to 12 ft. The large number of *Trachycarpus* are strong growing and some are up to 15 ft. *Phoenix Canariensis* are proving to be more hardy than expected and are up to 5 ft. *Chamaerops* and *Butia Capitata* are more recent plantings. There are a considerable number of *Phormium* in variety, also *Beschorneria*, *Echium*, Pomegranate, *Cyperus*, *Billbergia*, Bamboo, *Cupressus-Sempervirens*, *Lippa-Citriodora*, varieties of *Yucca*, some large specimens of which are sure to be in flower at Christmas, Giant leaved *Gunnera*, Cycad, *Callestemon*, with their dazzling red or yellow flowers, Arum-Lilies, *Canna*, *Embothrium*, *Dicksonia* (Tree fern), and a rare but genuine Glastonbury Thorn.

Most Agaves and 'Prickly-Pear' cacti are grown in large pots or tubs and kept by the shelter of walls in winter as, although they will tolerate the cold that we get here, the open soil is too wet for them in winter and they suffer from rot and slugs.

We have experimented with growing *Monstera-Delicosa* and *Bougainvillea* outside. They have been outside for eighteen months but it is unlikely that frost reached back to the wall where they were growing in last year's short and mild winter. Owing to the size and quantity of the specimens, no form of winter protection can be given to anything in the gardens, so if it will not grow unprotected, it is simply not grown at all.

The long process of the restoration and extension of the house is now complete, and, with its natural stone walls, terracotta tiles, round archways, and whitewashed courtyard, it looks very 'Mediterranean' and is completely in harmony with the 'exotics' growing around it; in fact, both house and garden are much better than that which was destroyed.





The Fall and Rise of an Exotic North Devon Garden

By Rev. Geoffrey Squire

It all began back in early 1961 when I visited the famous garden of Tresco in the Isles of Scilly. Here I saw huge banana 'trees' growing, as well as some very small plants of the same for sale on their plant stall. I bought one and it returned home with the camping goods on a very overloaded Lambretta scooter. Once home it was planted in a large pot and put in the old conservatory attached to our large Victorian terraced house in the North Devon town of Barnstaple.

In 1966 we moved to a house in the inland village of Swimbridge. It had a small field attached but no conservatory or greenhouse, so the banana, now about 4 ft. tall, was more or less abandoned in its pot by the end of the house. To my surprise, it survived the winter and so was planted out in the grass where it grew, sending out many young shoots. I decided to try other 'exotics' and added numerous *Cordyline Australis*, *Trachycarpus Fortunei*, *Yuccas*, *Callistemon*, *Eucalyptus* in variety, *Gunnera*, *Phormium*, and *Bougainvillea*. All grew well and the gardens, which were close to a village road, attracted considerable interest and were featured in the national press and in garden magazines on several occasions. Then came one exceptionally cold night in February 1987 when the region recorded its lowest ever temperature. *Bougainvillea* (outside for two years) was killed outright, bananas flopped to the ground as though dead, and much else looked brown and dying, but by the summer the bananas were growing well again and everything else except some small plants had recovered. The verdict was that 'exotics' were a realistic option for an inland North Devon garden.

I would have liked to have gone ahead and planted a much greater variety, but I knew that the garden faced an enemy that would cause far more damage than frost. It came in the form of

the Department of Transport. The house and ninety-nine percent of its gardens would be obliterated in October 1987 to make way for the construction of the new trunk road to the region.

We purchased an incomplete barn-conversion in the village of Goodleigh, some three miles east of Barnstaple. It had two small fields attached but it was a hillside site, exposed to the full force of the winds that blew in from the Atlantic, which could just be seen some fifteen miles in the distance, and the soil was mostly shallow, over rock. To begin with we had no intention to create much of a garden, but we did have a few very special semi-mature trees transplanted by JCB, and we also brought many shrubs and plants plonked into everything from dustbin bags to old tin cans and a considerable number of cuttings, and gradually a new garden began and gradually more and more of the grassy field was planted up.

Though we are some way from the almost frost-free regions of the Southwest, frosts are much less severe and of a much shorter duration than in more eastern or northern regions of England, and, with a high rainfall and a long growing season,

Continued on page 11...

Top, left: The lush leaves of Musa, with Agapanthus, Agave, and a yellow form of Cordyline to the front of the house in October sunshine.

Top, right: A little summer colour lingers on in the December sunshine before the first frost arrives; Musa, Datura, bronze Ricinus, and Pelargoniums in the rear courtyard.

Middle, left: An early spring view of the young flower buds of Beschorneria as they prepare to give their spectacular display.

Middle, right: The exotic and highly-scented flowers of one of the varieties of Datura. This species will only survive the mildest of winters here so we keep rooted cuttings under glass.

Bottom, left: An October view of part of the rear garden showing Trachycarpus Fortunei, Cordyline Australis, Yucca Gloriosa Variegata, Cupressus Sempervirens, Hibiscus, Crassula, and other 'exotics'.

Bottom, right: Winter sunshine over the lower garden with Trachycarpus Fortunei, Cordyline, Phormium, Phoenix Canariensis, and part of the shelterbelt of Pines and Eucalyptus. This was bare windswept grassland just 10 years ago.



Fingers Well and Truly Crossed

By Tony King, Romford, Essex, U.K.

2002 has been an interesting year for me in terms of Botanical events both within my collection and the plant world as a whole.

Let's start in the closing months of 2001, in my garden, with *Musa basjoo*.

My current clump of this species is descended from a plant purchased from Architectural plants around 11 years ago. The proprietor of the nursery, Angus White, had discovered a lone clump of this banana growing outside at RHS Garden, Wisley. He realised that it must be hardier than had generally been supposed for this species. Until this time the 'hardy banana' had been one of those inspiring and tantalising myths, only occasionally available as offsets from a few Cornish gardens and not the easily obtained plant we know today. For the first time, Angus's micro-propagation from the Wisley specimen put them in reach of a wider audience, eagerly awaiting a chance to try. Could we really grow a banana in the UK outside of the 'balmy' climate of south-west England?

Over succeeding years my plant has slowly spread. Sometimes I would protect the trunks over winter, but as this became more cumbersome and when I noticed that unprotected trunks grew back from winter damage to impressive sizes I stopped taking such precautions. As autumn 2001 approached my clump consisted of three large, (8 ft. +), trunks around five years old and two smaller ones. One of the tall plants began to produce ever-smaller leaves and the top of the stem took on a fat and bud-like appearance. Could this be my first bunch of bananas?? The tip, now a swollen bud, began to bend over but one thing was spoiling this moment for me... it was October! With the temperatures falling there was no way it would fruit

for me before the frosts arrived and just how could I try and protect such an awkward sized plant? As the weeks moved on the bud stopped developing and I made a feeble attempt to try and protect the trunk. This proved almost impossible given its size and, with a curved tip, its shape. I applied some wrapping as best I could but really it would be down to the plant and just how bad a winter we would get.

Fingers were well and truly crossed and although we had a couple of close calls, frosts were short lived and, amazingly, the trunk and its bud remained standing come the spring. With the arrival of warmer weather the bud continued to develop from where it had left off the following autumn. To my astonishment, another of the three taller trunks also began to produce a bud, much fatter and longer than the first. The third trunk pushed out new leaves. During the summer both fruiting trunks produced their amazing flowers in an ever elongating, droopy spike, with yellow male flowers at the tip, but only around four layers of small, green bananas at the top of the inflorescence. Not quite the spectacle of a bunch of bananas I was expecting but a thrill none the less! What is it that caused them to flower now when trunks of a similar age and size have never done so before, I cannot say.

As I write, September 2002, the third large trunk is still producing enormous leaves to be shredded in the wind. I wonder what sort of winter awaits this year!

Like many of you, my plant interests span many groups besides palms, such as orchids, bulbs and succulents. It is from the bulb and succulent part of my collection that two other firsts took place during the year. The first of these was the wonderful blooming of a South African bulb,

Haemanthus humilis hirsutus. *Haemanthus* are a wonderful group of bulbous plants that produce large and showy heads of flowers, usually during the autumn, in response to the arrival of winter rains. They follow this with the production of two, large, flat leaves that in some species can reach the size of dinner plates. In the case of the species mentioned, after some five years of cultivation it produced a lovely head of white fluffy flowers during the summer, which lasted almost two weeks! This floral extravaganza was followed by the production of its customary two thick, fleshy leaves, covered on the underside by thick, soft, downy hairs! (hence the name 'hirsutus')

The succulent flowering required even more patience than was needed for the *Musa* but was equally unexpected. First, let me set the scene. Just over twenty years ago, when I first started to visit Kew Gardens, I was intrigued by a plant that grew in the cactus and succulent house, a glasshouse that was demolished to make way for the mighty Princes of Wales Conservatory you see today. This plant was one of the *Sansevieria* family, known as mother-in-law's tongue in the UK where the widely grown houseplant variety is *S. trifasciata* v. *laurentii* with its yellow edged leaves.

The plant I admired, however, was unlike the familiar houseplant. It had wide, spreading leaves that were 'crinkled' along the edges. The background colour of the foliage was almost black, overlaid with silvery patterns and a 'coppery' almost metallic sheen. I tried hard to track down this resident of the arid lands of Eastern Africa, *Sansevieria kirkii* var. *pulchra*. After some months of enquiry a supplier was located, in Hawaii! An order was placed and I subsequently received the section of rhizome with two attached leaves. This plant has grown slowly and steadily on a sunny windowsill ever since. In July it started to produce a flower spike! This developed over a couple of weeks and gave a head of long, narrow, tubular white flowers which had a slight perfume. I had expected a stronger scent as I had read reports of sweetly fragranced blooms of other species in this family. The overall effect of the flower was like a firework on the end of stick, somewhat like a sparkler! The blooms lasted but a day individually

and overall the inflorescence continued for about a week. Not spectacular I grant but an unexpected novelty!

My final and most exciting event is just starting to take place as I write. One of two plants of the cycad *Dioon edule* that I have is beginning to produce a cone! The first cycad I have ever had to do so and very unexpected! I bought the two plants as seedlings some 16 years ago and never dreamed that such a slow growing cycad would ever cone for me. The plant in question failed to make new growth this year, but during August the stem began to swell. I thought I might be about to get a flush of new foliage but as the tip of the stem started to open out I could see the white of the cone emerging like an egg! You can imagine how excited I feel as the plant is far from being a large one, which is what I thought would have been needed for coning to take place; it still lives in a 3 litre deep pot!

Away from my collection, what turned out to be probably the biggest floral spectacle in more ways than one happened at Kew Gardens. One of the plants that initially fired my imagination for the world of plants is *Amorphophallus titanum*. Descriptions of its history, difficulty of cultivation, sheer size and air of mystery make it one of those amazing plants you can't believe is for real.

Whilst I have been able to appreciate the enormous single leaf this plant produces, like a small tree, I had yet to see one in bloom. In the summer of 1996 one did so at Kew but as I was due to leave for the IPS Biennial in the USA that year I only got to see the plant before the inflorescence opened. I was excited this year to learn that Kew had the possibility of not one but three plants coming into bloom! By experimentation and re-thinking the cultivation regime, they had grown the tubers to the huge size required for flowering in record time, around 75 kg in weight!

During May I tracked the progress of the developing bud of the first plant daily via the website. Timing when these huge blooms open is next to impossible to guess and this one did so mid-week. Being at work I had to wait until the weekend to visit. The bloom only stays fully open

for but a couple of days and by my visit on the Saturday it was closing up! I was lucky, though, to have arrived in the morning when viewing was quite straightforward, the only uncomfortable thing being the heat and humidity of the conservatory. By the afternoon, when I fancied a final look, the queues were just amazing, stretching out from the Princes of Wales Conservatory and around into the rock garden next to it! Police were being used to 'control' the crowd, so efficient had the media publicity machine been for this flowering of a Titan! So I had now seen the before and after but not the moment of full bloom!

My opportunity for this came with plant number two! This I also tracked daily with a will it/won't it open today apprehension. On the Saturday morning of June 1st I logged on to see the mighty bloom had opened over night. Standing 2.4 m tall, it had developed from a bud that had been 0.8 m high on 17 May. Quickly packing my camera, I dashed over to Kew. It was truly amazing! I spent ages taking photos, sweltering in the heat. The famous bad smell was not too unbearable; I think it had passed its peak and now just came in occasional waves. As an aroid lover I had smelt worse! The lack of publicity for this bloom meant no police and no crowds so viewing was perfect. I revisited it later in the day to take even more photos, as who knows when I would see another? A long ambition had been fulfilled.

The third plant, the smallest tuber of them all, also subsequently produced an inflorescence but didn't quite have the energy reserves to actually open it up! I hope the techniques being perfected at Kew mean that a flowering Titan becomes a more regular event, as it is certainly one of the awesome sights of the plant world.

Lastly, a new discovery! I wonder how many of you grow or have grown the houseplant *Clivia miniata* with its glossy, neat foliage and heads of orange blooms in the spring? I love *Clivia*, which have been bred to produce many forms, some highly sought after, such as those with yellow flowers or variegated foliage. They are revered, and widely grown in China and Japan where good

specimens sell for huge sums of money and special selections are given variety names. As a *Clivia* collector I have a few different selections, mostly seedlings, as well as an example from each of the other three species which occur in the wild across South Africa's Eastern Cape province. All of them are forest understory plants, lovers of filtered light and shady conditions. Imagine, then, the excitement this year when a new species was discovered, not from the forests, but growing in the area of Nieuwoudtville in the Northern Cape separated by 800 km of semidesert from its closest relations. Not only is this species geographically separated from all other known *Clivia* populations, it grows fully exposed to scorching sun and chilly nights, making it as far removed from its woodland cousins as you can get!

With a bulky, fleshy root system to hold onto any moisture, it hangs to cliff edges, a fan of stiff green leaves each carrying a distinctive stripe along the mid-rib, its pendulous blooms an orange red. Befitting its miraculous discovery, it has been named *C. mirabilis*. Such a plant brings all sorts of exciting possibilities for the introduction of new characteristics into the many *Clivia* breeding programmes taking place around the world. The 'new' plants are not widely distributed, their habitat forming part of a reserve. I understand that the South African nature authorities are considering a sustainable seed collecting and distribution programme which will be a good way to get this plant into cultivation and begin to satisfy the inevitable demand that will be seen.

It just shows how many plants await discovery as these would have been seen by many people who walk in the reserve and nobody realised what they were or how significant a discovery they represent in the world of *Clivia*!

So, all in all, 2002 has been an eventful year in the plant world!



Photo: Tony King



Exotics Message Boards

By Oscar Salden, Beegden, The Netherlands

Some of the most valuable kinds of sites on the world wide web concerning palms and other exotic plants are definitely message boards or discussion groups.

Message boards are mostly used with two goals, a) Exchange experiences/knowledge and b) Exchange plants/seeds

Exchange experiences

Palms often need very specific care. A good way to expand your knowledge and experiences about palms is to visit message boards. Not only can you read very specific information, but you also have the opportunity to ask questions that have not been answered by your palm books.

First, I will discuss a number of boards I think you definitely should visit as a Chamaerops member. Then, I will present an additional list of boards, followed by relevant Gardenweb and Yahoo boards.

Note 1: In the upcoming list are some non-English boards. Don't feel restricted because of another language. People on these boards are extremely dedicated to palms and would be glad to answer your questions in English.

Note 2: Most boards are public which means you can read and add messages without the requirement of a membership. Some boards are private which means you can only read and/or write messages if you are a member.

Message boards for Chamaerops readers

Below is a list of message boards that are extremely useful for Chamaerops members. These boards discuss only palm topics or are aimed at a corresponding or similar geographical location as

Europe. All of these boards have many new interesting topics daily and a vast group of experienced and dedicated members.

European Palm Society Messageboard

(private)

http://orion.he.net/cgi-bin/suid/palmtree/webbbs/webbbs_config.pl

A message board that is exclusively available for the members of this magazine. It speaks for itself that messages on this board are exactly discussing what we are interested in: palm trees!

Exoten (private)

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/exoten/>

A Dutch message board. This message board is by far the best board for Dutch speaking palm enthusiasts. The members of this board are extremely dedicated to exotics, organizing exotic plant travel and group buyings. Although palms are often the object of discussion there is a general interest in all exotic plants.

Exoten und Garten (public)

<http://members3.boardhost.com/Exoten/>

A message board in German. This board is very popular among the German speaking exotic gardeners. Most of the information is about cold hardy exotics making it a very useful board for Chamaerops members.

Forum le site des Fous de Palmiers (public)

<http://www.swisstools.net/forum/default.asp?fid=20982>

For the French speaking part of our palm gardeners there is the Fous de palmiers forum. It has frequent and high quality posts.

Hardy Palm & Subtropical Board (public)

<http://members3.boardhost.com/HardyPalm/>

Right: Screenshot of the EPS forum which has well over 3500 postings. Internet address see above.

Many new topics appear daily on this US-based board. More than half of the messages are about palms, and are often about hardy palms.

International Palm Society Message Board (public)

<http://www.palms.org/palmtalk/>

One of the most popular palm message boards on the web. Discussions on this board are almost completely focussed on hardy and non-hardy palm trees. This board has members from all over the world and is not focused on one geographic location like many other boards.

UK Oasis (private)

<http://pub52.ezboard.com/fukoasisfrm1>

Another heavy traffic message board. Messages on this board are not specifically dedicated to palms, but include all kind of exotic plants. The board is very useful because it is aimed at the UK, which has a climate resembling the climate in which many Chamaerops members live.

Other message boards

The number of message boards has increased a lot over the years. I cannot review all boards, but a few are worth mentioning:

Central Florida Palm and Cycad Bulletin Board TOC (public)

http://plantapalm.com/centralfl/disc1_tocf.htm

Coudforest Café (public)

<http://www.cloudforest.com/cafe>

Gulf Breeze Garden BBS (public)

<http://liconx.com/gulfbreeze/>

Hardy Palms and More for the Northeast (public)

<http://members3.boardhost.com/joe02917/>

Hardy Palms In Temperate Zones Board (public)

<http://members3.boardhost.com/MIDWESTPALMS/>

Palm Centre Forum (public)

http://www.palmcentre.co.uk/cgi-bin/webbbs5/webbbs_config.pl

Palmen in der Schweiz (public)

<http://www.beepworld.de/members39/palms/index.htm>

Palmeperpaket forum (public)

<http://www.palmeperpaket.de/forum>

Palm Tree Paradise Message Board (public)

<http://members.boardhost.com/palms/>

CCInfo Pflanzen Pinnwand (public)

http://www.forumromanum.de/member/forum/forum.cgi?USER=user_66739

Southeastern Palm & Exotic Plant Society Bulletin Board (public)

<http://members4.boardhost.com/speps/>

Tropical Attitudes Gardening Message Board (public)

<http://www.raingardens.com/bbs/>

Gardenweb

Gardenweb (<http://www.gardenweb.com>) is a very large site about gardening. This site has many forums about plants. I have listed the ones that discuss palms. If you are interested in palms from a certain region you should visit a "region" forum.

Palms and Cycads (private)

<http://forums.gardenweb.com/forums/palms/>

Tropical Plants (private)

<http://forums.gardenweb.com/forums/tropical/>

Tropicalesque Gardens (private)

<http://forums.gardenweb.com/forums/tropesque/>

Xeriscaping & Southwestern Gardening (private)

<http://forums.gardenweb.com/forums/swest/>

Yahoo Groups

There are more yahoo groups focussing on palm topics than the ones listed below. However, some of them have a very small number of members. Therefore, I will only mention the large groups. If you are interested in smaller relevant yahoo groups, please visit the yahoo forum site (<http://groups.yahoo.com>) and do a search on "palms".

Nzpalmcycad (private)

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/nzpalmcycad/>

Palms (private)

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Palms/>

Palmsociety (private)

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/palmsociety/>

Although most message boards are mainly focused on exchanging experiences about palms, there are some boards that are completely focused on exchanging plants.

Plant exchange (private)

<http://forums.gardenweb.com/forums/explant/>

Seed exchange (private)

<http://forums.gardenweb.com/forums/exseed/>

CCInfo Pflanzen Tauschbörse (public)

http://www.forumromanum.de/member/forum/forum.cgi?USER=user_66801

Tauschbörse für winterharte Exoten (public)

http://www.forumromanum.de/member/forum/forum.cgi?USER=user_139281

Nonworking links

Unfortunately, www addresses sometimes change and it is very well possible that some of the listed links will not be accessible in the future. This doesn't mean that the message boards have gone, however. Often they have moved to another address. There are several ways of finding them.

First, you can try to enter the first part of the address. For example <http://www.palms.com> instead of <http://www.palms.org/palmtalk>

Then you need to take a good look at the site and chances are fairly large you will find the new link to the message board. A second way to find a lost link is to do a search in a powerful search engine like Google (<http://www.google.com>)



Send letters, articles and pictures to:

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E-mail: mail@palmssociety.org

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