

PALM PORTRAIT***Tectiphiala ferox***

Tectiphiala ferox, a new genus from

Mauritius in the *Oncosperma* alliance, was described recently by Dr. Moore (*Gentes Herbarum* 11: 284-290, 1978). On our second visit to Mauritius, which comprised one leg of an exten-



1. *Tectiphiala ferox* at Crown Land Declerc with Phyllis Sneed and T. A. M. Gardner for scale.



2. The crownshaft and inflorescences with developing fruit of *Tectiphiala ferox*.

sive trip we had undertaken, my wife Phyllis and I were privileged to see *Tectiphiala* and to attempt to collect its seeds. Not many of the palms exist (about 28 as reported by Dr. Moore) and apparently they have survived because they occur in scrub forest on land unsuited for the growing of sugar cane that has replaced the indigenous flora of most lowland areas of the island. We had not seen this palm before and assume that it doesn't exist elsewhere.

We are much indebted to Mr. T. A. M. Gardner of the Forestry Department (and a member of The Palm Society) not only for his good hospitality but also for his helpfulness in guiding us to the site of the palm in a reserve.



3. Long blackish spines over a cover of short brown hairs adorn the leaf sheaths and unexpanded inflorescences of *Tectiphiala ferox*.
Photo by H. E. Moore, Jr.

Although Mauritius is not a big island, it is doubtful that one in quest of the palm could find it without knowledgeable direction.

Tectiphiala is a very attractive small palm with unusual features that enhance its allure to us as a potential ornamental. In Figure 1, Mr. Gardner and Phyllis provide scale for one of three specimens located not far from each other in low bush in a reasonably accessible area in the reserve. The crownshaft and inflorescences with developing fruits are shown in Figure 2. The crownshaft has considerable beauty, being of unusual color and texture. I would call the color cinnamon-brown or, perhaps, rust. It is adorned with long, blackish, yet soft spines in the lower part over a covering of short brown hairs that feels almost velvety to the touch (Fig. 3). Unfortunately, it is unlikely that the few popcornlike, dark-colored fruits we were able to collect had viable seed. The mature fruit, according to Dr. Moore, is blue-

black, larger than those pictured, and rarely obtainable.

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PALM BRIEFS

On Champion Palms of Texas

Recently, Johnson (1979) reported the sizes of several champion palms from the 1978 National Register of Big Trees (American Forests 84: 18-47, April 1978). An error originating within this National Register was repeated by Johnson (1979).

The error involves the location of the champion *Sabal mexicana* which was reported to be growing at "Cameron City, Texas." No such community exists (Texas Almanac, A.H. Belo Corp., Dallas); the error probably originated as a misprint of "Cameron County." In Texas, *Sabal mexicana* is restricted to river bottom and resaca (abandoned river channels) woodlands of the Rio Grande in extreme southern Texas where it is limited to Cameron and Hidalgo counties (almost totally in the former county).

The National Champion *S. mexicana* occurs in the best remnant of *Sabal* woodland remaining in this area. This palm stand—long known as Rabb's Grove—is located approximately ten kilometers southeast of Brownsville. The nearest settlement is an unincorporated area known as Southmost. Essentially all of the surrounding country has been cleared for agricultural utilization. Formerly owned by a series of private individuals, this area has recently (1972) been purchased and protected by the National Audubon Society. The Sabal Palm Grove encompasses a total of 172 acres but only about 34 acres still support native stands of *S. mexicana*

(Keating, 1975; see also Jan. 1978 *Audubon* 80(1): 128-137, 198).

Discussion of a recent nomenclatural change is appropriate at this point. Johnson (1979) stated that the listed *S. mexicana* "probably refers to the Texas palmetto, *Sabal texana*." His supposition is correct. The most recent nomenclatural list of palms (Glassman, 1972) reduces *S. texana* (Cook) Beccari to a synonym of *S. mexicana* Martius. Most workers north of the Rio Grande have, probably partially through political chauvinism, referred to the South Texas populations as *S. texana* (e.g., see Correll and Johnston, 1970: 341). Note, however, that the Registry of Champion Big Trees in Texas (Texas Forest Service, May 1979) now lists this champion as the Mexican palmetto, *Sabal mexicana*. This nomenclatural change no doubt reflects reality as the now isolated populations of the delta of the Rio Grande would have been in contact with populations in Tamaulipas, Mexico, during the most recent pluvial period of the Pleistocene. Of course, these Rio Grande populations may differ subspecifically from southern Tamaulipas populations.

One other champion palm classification could be created for a Texas palm. However, there is a complicated nomenclatural problem associated with the population. The dwarf palmetto, *Sabal minor*, is normally acaulescent or only slightly caulescent. Populations of a palmetto with well-developed trunks are known in a restricted area of the San Bernard River bottomlands in Brazoria County. The tallest known specimen is reported to be 5.4 meters or 17.8 feet (*vide* R. A. Vines in Bomhard, 1943). Vines (in Bomhard, 1943) reported these caulescent forms to be "very limited in distribution. Eighteen plants within a half-mile radius. Old settlers say this small iso-