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## Livistona exigua, A Rare Bornean Palm Refound

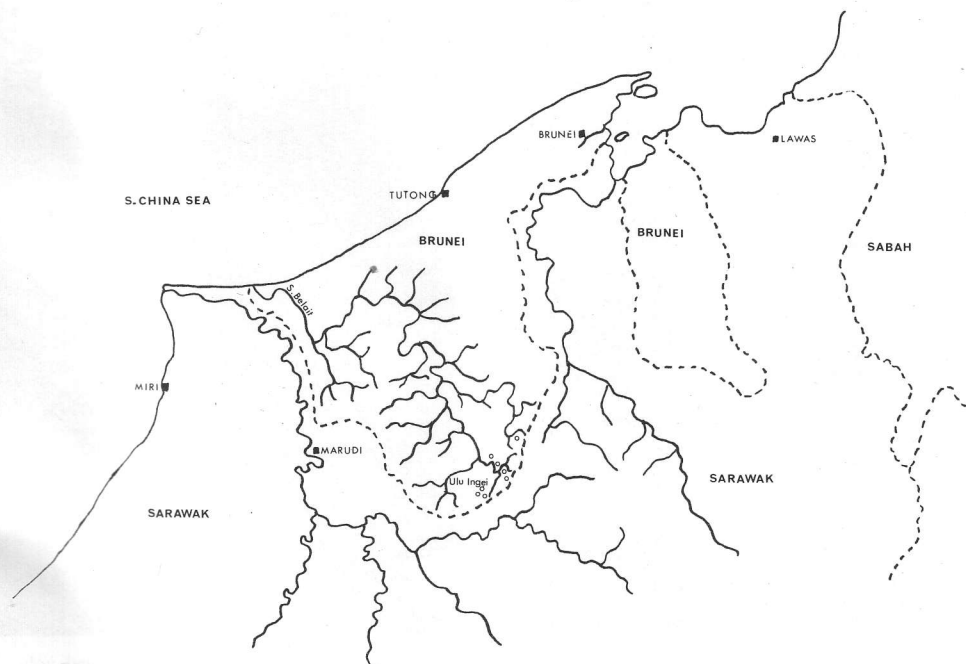
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In 1959, P. S. Ashton collected a dwarf fan palm from forest transitional between lowland Dipterocarp forest and heath forest ("kerangas") in the Ulu Ingei, Brunei, near the border with Sarawak. The collection was sent to Kew where eventually it was sorted and studied in detail by one of us (J.D.). Superficially like a *Licuala* in habit, the leaf splits were found to be induplicate as is usual among fan palms, rather than reduplicate as is the case in *Licuala*. Floral structure showed the palm to belong to *Livistona*. This exciting, unrecorded dimension to the genus—an undergrowth,

dwarf, rain forest palm—needed recording and so the palm was duly described, as *L. exigua* (Dransfield 1977). In late 1977, when one of us (J.D.) visited the G. Mulu National Park in Sarawak, *L. exigua* was searched for but without success. Still known only from a single herbarium specimen, the chances of recollecting the palm and attempting to introduce it into cultivation seemed remote indeed.

Then the other author (P.R.M.), on forest survey work in Brunei, revisited Ashton's original collecting locality and



1. Map of Brunei and neighboring Sarawak; O = distribution of *Livistona exigua*.



2. Crown of *L. exigua* showing pendulous infructescence.



3. Close-up of pendulous infructescence.



4. Erect infructescence in a short-stemmed individual.



5. Seedling of *L. exigua* has very much the appearance of a species of *Licuala*.

re-found the palm. Since then the palm has been found in several localities in the Belait District along the border of Brunei and Sarawak (see map). In the Ulu Ingei, it was found growing exclusively on remnant Pleistocene terraces which cap the tertiary sandstone cuestas on the rim of the Belait syncline at an altitude of 500 feet. In the Ulu Pelir Regang it occurs on very heavily eroded remnant terraces, again at 500 feet altitude. At the summit of Batu Patam and on nearby ridges it occurs up to an altitude of 865 feet. In all localities the soil is podzolized with a marked illuviated horizon of white sand. *Livistona exigua* is always confined to the top of these ridges and never grows on the side slopes. Thus its distribution is very limited and broken. Despite differences between localities, the forest in all three areas is of the general "kerangas" or heath forest type. *L. exigua* is an understory palm and

when young and closely growing, it forms thickets of its elegant fan leaves. The slender trunks remain clothed in dead leaf bases and fibrous sheaths for a considerable time. Older individuals are usually to be found in more open conditions and eventually reach about 15 feet tall; in such tall individuals, the trunk becomes bare and is finely ringed with leaf scars.

*Livistonia exigua* was found flowering and fruiting in January and February 1982. Seed received at Kew from these collections finally germinated in June 1983. This is a very elegant palm as the figures testify. However in the experience of growers at Kew, palms from "kerangas" forest seem very difficult to cultivate.

#### LITERATURE CITED

- DRANSFIELD, JOHN. 1977. A dwarf *Livistona* (*Palmae*) from Borneo. Kew Bulletin 31(4): 759-762.