

Evidence of Suckering in *Hemithrinax* *ekmaniana*

ANDREW STREET

Montgomery Botanical Center
19001 Old Cutler Road
Miami, Florida 33156 USA
andrew@montgomerybotanical.
org



1. The caespitose habit is hardly noticeable with only a casual glance.

To palm lovers, *Hemithrinax ekmaniana* needs no introduction. To others seeing it for the first time, there is an exotic allure to this Cuban endemic. *Hemithrinax ekmaniana*, with its lollipop shape, is a highly coveted, critically endangered palm.



2. A closer inspection shows another small shoot coming from the base of the main plant.

I have read about this palm many times, and although I have never seen it in Cuba, I am told that the setting where it grows is as breathtaking as the plant itself. Still, never had I seen any description of this plant possibly being a clustering palm. All literature states that it is a solitary species.

Given that *Hemithrinax ekmaniana* is known to be a solitary palm, you can imagine my shock

at discovering two axillary shoots on one of my plants (Figs. 1–4). This finding naturally triggered a head-to-toe check-up of the palm: the emerging spear leaf was tight, and the palm's color was nothing out of the ordinary. In short, the plant was sturdy and healthy.

My next thought was that these shoots were perhaps seedlings from dormant seeds that had sprouted long after planting or from seeds



3. Moving aside the leaves reveals an established second stem.

of some nearby *Coccothrinax* germinating at the base of my palm. I quickly ruled this out after I gently excavated around the shoots and found that they were connected to the main plant. I began to consider the notion that *Hemithrinax ekmaniana* can, on occasion, exhibit a clustering habit.

In other genera, differences in stem number – solitary versus caespitose – are not sufficient evidence of separate species. A relative of *Hemithrinax ekmaniana*, *Coccothrinax argentata*, is known to sucker occasionally at the base of the trunk. If the main stem grows to robust adulthood, the small suckers will cease to grow



4. On the other side is a third stem with fully palmate leaves and elongated petioles.

and eventually die. This is most likely also the case with *Hemithrinax ekmaniana*. When you consider the heavy petticoat of dead leaves carried by this species, it is no wonder the small sprouts have never been noticed. Under natural conditions, if these sprouts ever occur, they would surely be overtaken by the healthy growth of the primary stem.

Since making my initial observation, I have found another example of a suckering plant in my collection, and I have heard anecdotal evidence of another observation of suckering of this critically endangered palm. It is all par for the course when you grow rare, little-known palms!