

My Favorite Island Edition (or) Only a Dodo Wouldn't Like Mauritius!

Indian Ocean: A Palm Odyssey

Gallant palm explorer and IPS endowment advocate, Mel Sneed wrote nearly one-half century ago, "There are times when palm enthusiasts have to sit back and wonder what will happen in the sweep of world events, that might well lead to destruction of what remains of some of the world's finest flora. Little enough of it is left as it is. At this writing (1978) ominous rumblings come forth not far from places that harbor rare plants dear to collectors." [*Principes*, 25(4): 153. 1981] Disappointingly this remains as true today as it was forty-six years ago! Clearly there's no time like the present to visit and conserve precious palm habitats worldwide.

In honor of Melvin and Phyllis Sneed, the title "Indian Ocean: A Palm Odyssey" is taken from their landmark articles of the same name which appeared in *Principes* in 1982. Like the Sneed's, my essays will have multiple parts:

Part 1: Mauritius, this issue of the Newsletter.

Part 2: Seychelles, next month's Newsletter.

Part 3: La Réunion, an upcoming issue of *Palms*

The Dutch artist Roelant Savery's painting of a Dodo (actual title "The Dodo and Other Birds," ca. 1630 and held in the collection of the Natural History Museum, London), ignited a fascination with the flora and fauna of Mauritius. Now of course the Dodo (along with its nearest relative, the Rodriguez Solitaire – also large and flightless) are extinct, and the living bird genealogically nearest to them is the Nicobar pigeon, which is small and flies. All this is a prologue to the world's loneliest palm and the acute need for conservation on Mauritius Island.



No it's not a dodo, it's a pink pigeon!
Nesoenas mayeri, native to Mauritius.
Photo by Dr. Laz Priegues.

Mauritius

Curepipe

It was definitely bucket-list time in Mauritius, and our first stop, direct from the international airport, was the SSR Botanical Garden at Curepipe. Now named for Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, the first post-independence Prime Minister of Mauritius, and not to be confused with the garden bearing the same name in Pamplemoues (your editor's favorite garden which will be reviewed in the December newsletter). The garden at Curepipe was established in 1870 and consists of about 27 acres. Here we find the world's rarest palm, the only living individual of *Hyophorbe amaricaulis*.

The star attraction, the one and (dolefully) only, *Hyophorbe amaricaulis*. This single tree is a surviving remnant from what was once a thriving forest. Given the park was created in 1870, it is assumed that this specimen is over 150 years old.



Not even the rain could dampen our spirits upon entering this fabled place.



MUNICIPAL COUNCIL OF CUREPIPE

Hyophorbe amaricaulis (Aracaceae)
Unique Specimen Known through the Island

Description: Palm with the trunk reaching 18 metres in height. Leaves 5-6 on three rows, pinnate. Pinnae 60-80. Inflorescence ramified, 70 cm long. Flowers 6-7, white fruit sub-globose, dark red.

General information: "Hyophorbe" is derived from the Greek, meaning pig fruit.
Parks & Gardens Section

Hyophorbe amaricaulis (Aracaceae)
Unique Specimen connue dans L'île

Description: Palmier avec un tronc atteignant 18 mètres de haut. Feuilles 5-6 sur 3 rangées, pennées. Pennes 60-80. Inflorescence ramifiée, 70 cm de long. Fleurs 6-7, blanches. Le fruit est presque sphérique, rouge foncé.

Information générale: "Hyophorbe" est dérivé du mot grecque et qui signifie 'fruit à cochon'
Section Parcs et Jardins



*Hyophorbe amari-
caulis* (also known
as the Loneliest
Palm), photo by
Gregg Hamann on
a much sunnier day.

The palm's trunk is covered with epiphytic algae.



The *Acanthophoenix rubra* at Curepipe looked different than those seen in Réunion. They were quite red, appeared stiffer and lacked the distinctive “elephant foot” (likely due to less wind in this non-coastal location).

Photos by
Gregg Hamann.



Black River Gorges National Park by Dr. Boyd Marts

Black River Gorges National Park, created in 1994 in the southwest region of Mauritius, is the largest of its two national parks and is comprised of 16,250 acres. Encompassing 2 or 3% of the island, it constitutes the last remaining native forest on the island. An average rainfall of 39 inches occurs in the lowlands (average temperature: 81°F in summer, 70°F in winter) and 157 inches in the uplands (average temperature: 70°F in summer, 63°F in winter). The highest point is Piton de la Riviere Noire (2694 feet). The park is home to seven waterfalls – the most famous of which is Alexandra Falls (2296 feet above sea level).

The park provides habitat for the remaining 28 endemic bird species, including the endangered pink pigeon, Mauritius bulbul, Mauritius olive white eye, Echo parakeet and Mauritius kestrel. It is also home to the native Mauritius flying fox (fruit bat, wingspan 31 inches) as well as introduced species including rusa deer, wild boar and long tailed macaques. On the island, there are several native palm species – *Acanthophoenix rubra*, *Dictyosperma album*, *D. conjugatum* (endemic), *Hyophorbe amaricaulis* (endemic), *H. lagenicaulis* (endemic), *H. vaughanii* (endemic), *Latania loddigesii* (endemic), and *Tectiphiala ferox* (endemic). In addition, it is reported that over 200 exotic palm species have been introduced to the island with only 72 surviving and 15 currently being cultivated. Within the park, a number of these palm species thrive. The park is home to 163 of the 311 endemic plant species, including the tambalacoque tree (dodo tree, *Sideroxylon grandiflorum*). There are four entry points to the park. Entry into the park is free and it is open daily, but does close due to heavy rainfall. Within the park there are two visitor information centers and several picnic areas. There are 37 miles of hiking trails that are marked, range in difficulty from easy to strenuous, and can be self navigated or traversed with a local guide. Merchants selling refreshments and souvenirs can be found at several viewpoints as well. Close to the park is Chamarel Falls, the island's tallest waterfall (272 feet). Other nearby attractions include Chamarel Colored Earth, the Rhumerie de Chamarel (one of the oldest rum distilleries), the Bois-Cheri tea factory and the Grand Basin Lake Hindu Temple.

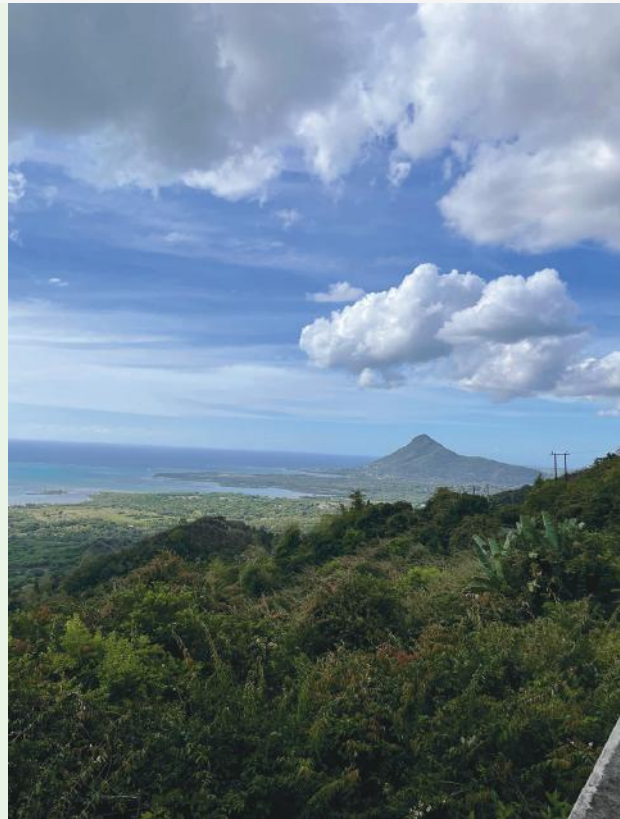
The topography of Black River Gorges National Park and environs, all photos by Dr. Boyd and Stacy Marts.

Chamarel colored earth.





Chamarel Falls



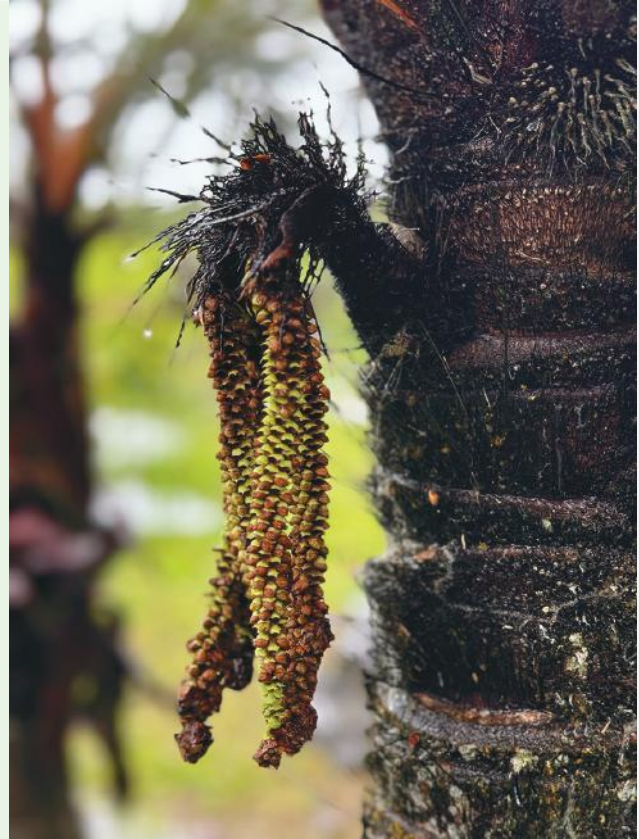
Black River Gorge western edge, overlooking the Indian Ocean.

Grand Basin Lake Hindu Temple.



Tectiphiala ferox at Le Petrin Information Centre. Photo by Gregg Hamann

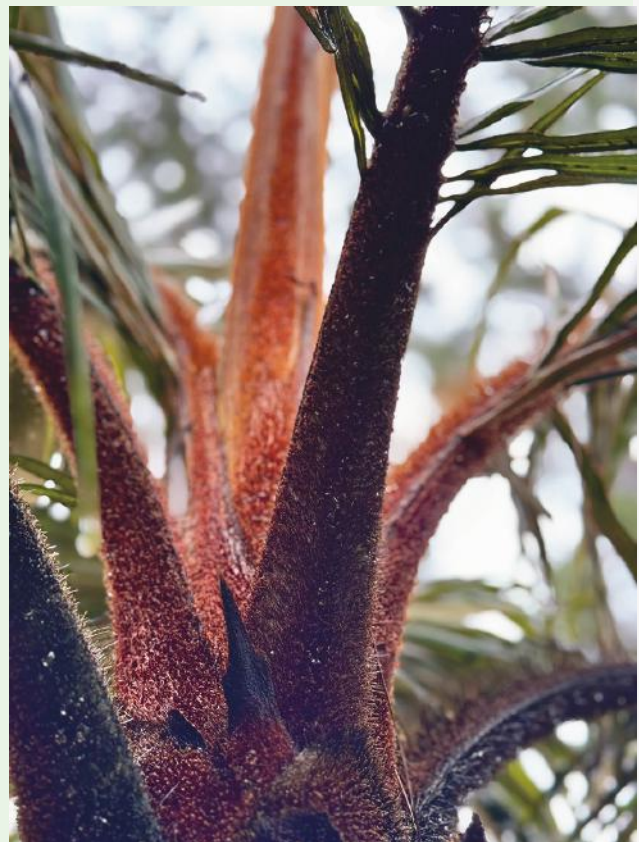




Tectiphiala ferox

Above left: The palm with Debby Hamann for scale. Photo by Gregg Hamann

Above right, inflorescence. At right, petioles with rusty red tomentum. Photos by Michael Lock.





Bras D'Eau National Park

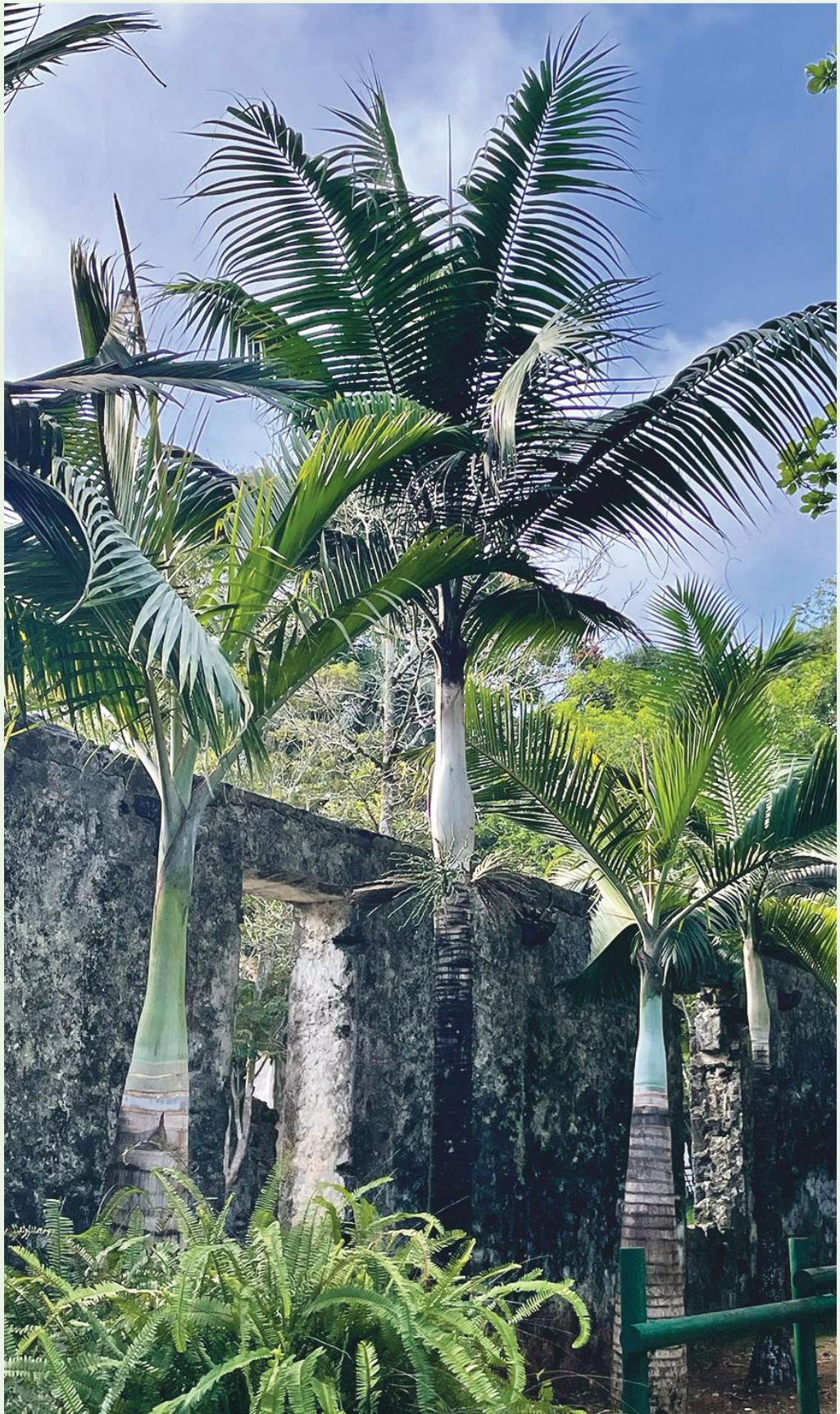
Bras D'Eau, established in 2011, is the second national park after Black Gorges. Many native palms have been planted among the ruins of an old sugar mill that ceased operations in 1867.

Left: *Latania loddigesii*.

Below: *Hyophorbe lagenicaulis*.

Following page: *Dictyosperma album* (center).





Round Island

A mythical speck of uninhabited land and off-limits to non-scientists, Round Island has long been on my bucket list. This tiny islet, less than 1.7 km in area, has three distinct endemic species: *Dictyosperma album* var. *conjugatum*, *Hyophorbe lagenicaulis* and *Latania loddigesii*. I was able to get tantalizingly close to land on a dive boat. IPS Director and experienced scuba-diver Gregg Hamann (AKA my bodyguard) and I explained to the bewildered boat full of mostly non-English speaking divers about the incredible palm diversity on the island, and suddenly out came all the cameras. It was a great experience, and I believe we might have a few new IPS members as a result! Alas, actual landfall still remains on my bucket list.



A sun halo over the Indian Ocean en route.



Land ho!



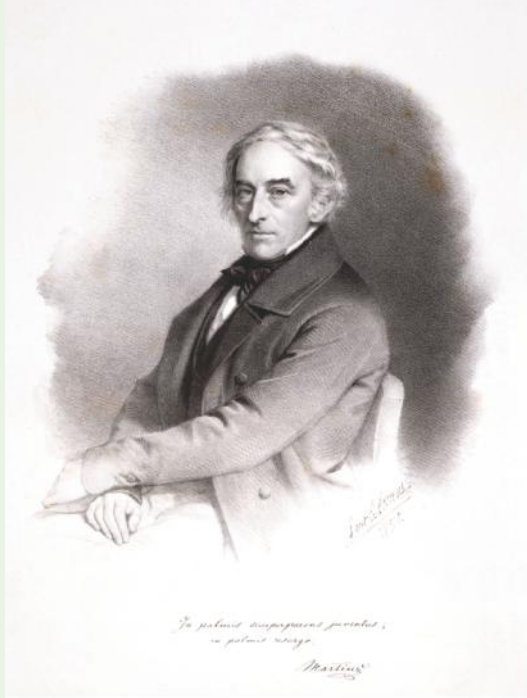
A veritable forest of *Latania loddigesii*.



International Palm Day: Apr 17th

In 1963, Dr. P. B. Tomlinson, a research scientist at Fairchild Tropical [Botanic] Garden conceived of the International Palm Year. This included funding for palm seed collecting, an “intensification” of the distribution of palm seeds and the measurement of palm growth rates worldwide [*Principes* 7(1): 4–7.1963].

Later, a consortium of palm botanists and conservationists created International Palm Day which honors Carl Friedrich Philipp von Martius, Professor of Botany and director of the Royal Botanic Garden in Munich. The date chosen is Martius’ birthday, April 17 (1794). Professor Martius was acclaimed for his landmark three volume reference *Historia Naturalis Palmarum* (Natural History of Palms), published between 1823 and 1853. In fact his renown was of such magnitude that he has been acknowledged as the Father of Palms [*Principes* 23(4): 158–170. 1979]. Upon his death in 1868, his coffin was strewn with fresh palm fronds.



International Palm Day was organized to achieve global recognition for not only palm species in jeopardy but also the fragility of palm habitats worldwide.

Join us on social media with the tag #PalmDay and tell us how you celebrate International Palm Day.

Upcoming Travel with the IPS

Pre-Tour:
September 21, 2024
Sold out

Board of Directors meeting:
September 22, 2024 (Sunday)

Biennial:
Arrive September 22, 2024
Depart September 30, 2024
Sold out

Post-tour:
October 1–4, 2024
registration now open



Palm Books: *The Palms of New Guinea*

Undoubtedly the palm book of the year has been published and is now available to order in hardcopy as well as download (for free):

<https://zenodo.org/records/10794336>

Kudos to Dr. Bill Baker, International Palm Society journal editor, director and benefactor, who coordinated his team of co-authors, in the production of this superlative tome. I was delighted to note the acknowledgment the IPS's role in the creation of this book.

THE STORY OF NEW GUINEA PALM EXPLORATION — the role of *Palms*, the journal of the International Palm Society

In addition to taxonomic papers in general botanical journals, the exploration of the New Guinea palm flora over the past five decades has been especially well-documented in the journal of the International Palm Society, *Palms* (formerly *Principes* until 1999), via expedition accounts, descriptions of new taxa and profiles of species and genus discoveries (Moore 1966, Essig 1972, 1982, 1995, Essig & Young 1980, 1981a, 1981b, 1985, Sneed 1985, Baker 1997, Forster 1997, Baker *et al.* 2000a, 2000b, 2018, Dowe & Ferrero 2000, Dransfield *et al.* 2000a, 2000b, Heatubun 2000, 2008, Zona 2000, Baker & Zona 2006, Bacon & Baker 2011, Baker & Heatubun 2012, Heatubun *et al.* 2012b, 2014a, 2014d, Baker & Venter 2019, Petoe *et al.* 2019, Barfod & Baker 2022, Dowe & Venter 2023). Many new species from New Guinea have been described in the journal, including several that have come to light through horticulture (e.g. Baker *et al.* 2000b, Dransfield *et al.* 2000a, Gardiner *et al.* 2012, Dransfield & Marcus 2020). A New Guinea special issue of *Palms* was published in 2000 (volume 44, part 4). Other specialist palm journals, such as *Palms and Cycads* and *The Palm Journal* have also been important in disseminating information about New Guinea palms to a wide audience.



Parting Shot

A grove of perfect *Hyophorbe lagenicaulis*. Where else but Mauritius!

