Palm Beach Palm & Cycad Society

Affiliate of the International Palm Society

Monthly Update February 2011

FEATURED THIS MONTH: *Heterospathe elmeri*

Encephalartos natalensis X *Encephalartos woodii* hybrid growing at Fairchild Tropical Botanical Garden *(Photo by Charlie Beck)*

FRONT COVER: *Heterospathe elmeri* growing in the Beck garden. *(Photo by Charlie Beck)*

Palm Beach Palm & Cycad Society 2011 Officers

Betty Ahlborn, President (561) 722-8106
Tom Ramiccio, First Vice President, Sales (561) 582-5915
Marshall Dewey, Second Vice President, Planting
Dale Holton, Third Vice President, Programs (561) 965-6792
Ruth Sallenbach, Secretary (561) 965-5430
Ingrid Dewey, Treasurer
Tom Whisler (561) 627-8328
Brenda Beck, Editor & Historian (561) 963-5511

Appointees

Charles Beck, Librarian
Anthony Dougherty, Web Master
Ruth Lynch, Refreshment Chairman (561) 312-5046
Jeff Hutchinson, Activities & Events Coordinators

VISIT US AT palmbeachpalmcycadsociety.com

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Opinions expressed and products or recommendations published in this newsletter may not be the opinions or recommendations of the Palm Beach Palm & Cycad Society or its board of directors.

Encephalartos natalensis X *Encephalartos woodii* Hybrid
(by Charlie Beck)

In a recent visit to Fairchild Tropical Botanical Garden (FTBG), I was stopped in my tracks by an outstanding cycad. It was a cross between *Encephalartos natalensis* and *Encephalartos woodii*. I've been to FTBG hundreds of times and have never noticed this cycad in the past. I'm never disappointed when visiting FTBG – I usually discover interesting plants that I have not noted previously.

For those of you who may not be aware of the history of *E. woodii*, here is a short summary as reported in Loran Whitelock's book, "The Cycads." *E. woodii* was first discovered in South Africa in 1895. This single male plant is the only specimen ever found in the wild and was estimated to be several thousand years old. Between 1903 and 1916, eleven propagations were made from this single plant. Seven offsets and four large stems were rooted. Over time, these original eleven propagations were vegetatively reproduced and distributed worldwide to botanical gardens and private collectors. As of 2002, there were an estimated 500 plants in existence – all male plants. While cycads have been known to change sex on rare occasions, i.e., through lightning strike or other trauma, this sex change has not yet occurred with *E. woodii*. Without a female plant, seeds of *E. woodii* cannot be produced. A plan to hybridize *E. woodii* with its closest relative, *E. natalensis*, has been devised. If this cross produces a female hybrid, then this hybrid may then be crossed back with the male *E. woodii*. After five generations of crossing, a 97 percent genetically pure *E. woodii* female would be produced. This method would take a minimum of 75 years. Tissue culture of *E. woodii* has been tried with little success. Propagations by leaf cuttings have been made but this is a very slow process.

***Encephalartos woodii* in Loren Whitelock's garden.**
(Photo by Chip Jones)

Until plants of *E. woodii* are available through large scale reproduction, we will have to enjoy specimens in botanical gardens or appreciate the handsome cross between *E. natalensis* and *E. woodii*.

(See additional photos on pages 10 and 11.)

FEATURED THIS MONTH: *Heterospathe elmeri*

by Charlie Beck

Heterospathe elmeri is a small to medium palm endemic to Camiguin Island in the Philippines. It is a monoecious palm with pinnate fronds. In habitat it grows in dense lowland forest, trunks reportedly grow to 25 feet, and fronds grow 10 to 12 feet long

Heterospathe elmeri was offered for sale at Fairchild's Membership Day in 2009. I was not familiar with this palm but I bought one because it was very attractive in the pot and I was trying to build up my collection of *Heterospathe* species. I've never seen this palm offered for sale before or after, but Fairchild had a large inventory for sale in 2009. It was a well grown specimen in a 3 gallon pot so I immediately planted it in the ground on mounded soil in a partially shaded location. This palm adapted well to our sandy soil and is a strong grower. Palm literature lists this species as "extremely slow growing," but our specimen is now 8 feet in overall height just after 1 ½ years in the ground. The fronds are very dark green and measure 5 feet long. The leaflets closest to the stem are limp and pendent, hanging straight down. This is a very tropical feature similar to *Aphandra natalia* which we saw on our trip to Ecuador.

Heterospathe elmeri

The *Heterospathe* most commonly grown in Florida is *H. elata*. These were the palms planted in the Mounts Botanical Garden parking lot that were replaced by *Wodyetia bifurcata* in 2009. When fertilized and irrigated, *H. elata* is a handsome palm but it does tend to show some potassium deficiency in the coldest months. In comparison, *H. elmeri* stays very dark green throughout the year and showed no signs of cold damage in our past record cold winters. It is a smaller palm with shorter fronds and a narrower stem. It appears the stem will emerge in the 4 to 5 inch diameter range as compared to the 7 inch diameter of *H. elata*.

Of the many *Heterospathe* species we have in our garden, *H. elmeri* is my favorite. Its dark green fronds with its pendent leaflets give this palm a very tropical look. It appears well adapted to our sandy soils when given regular fertilization and irrigation. The cold tolerance of this palm is surprising when you consider how close to the Equator it grows in habitat. Seek out this palm if you can find it. It is a real standout.

***

UPCOMING MEETINGS

GENERAL MEETING

Date:	Wednesday, February 2, 2011
Time	7:30 p.m.
Location	Mounts Botanical Garden
Speaker:	Dale Holton
Subject:	The Best Palms for South Florida

EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING

Date:	Wednesday, February 23, 2011
Time:	7:00 p.m.
Location:	Ruth Sallenbach's Home
	6285 S. Military Trail, Lake Worth
	(561) 965-5430

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Sally Hurley
Sally Marks
Brian Pertuch

Palm Beach Palm & Cycad Society Membership

Be sure to keep your membership up to date. It will insure that you receive all Palm Beach Palm & Cycad Society communications. Annual membership is $25 per person per year and membership runs from January 1 to December 31. Membership can be renewed by sending payments to the Society at P.O. Box 21-2228, Royal Palm Beach, FL 33421.

Thank you for your support of the Palm Beach Palm & Cycad Society. We hope to see you at all of our general meetings which take place on the first Wednesday of every month at Mounts Botanical Garden in West Palm Beach. Be sure to watch for information regarding our field trips, special activities, and palm and cycad shows and sales.

A Tour of Huntington Garden

by Brenda Beck

At our January 5th general meeting, Dale Holton was our guest speaker. His slide presentation was an overview of his visit to Huntington Botanical Garden in San Marino, California. This garden was founded by Henry E. Huntington in 1919. Mr. Huntington was a businessman involved with railroads, real estate, and utilities. His main interests included books, art, and gardens.

The Huntington covers 207 acres and has a conservatory and art museum on site. Approximately 120 acres consists of beautifully landscaped gardens that are open to the public. Each section of the garden was developed with a theme. Theme gardens include Australian, Camellia, Children's, Chinese, Desert, Herb, Japanese, Jungle, Lily Pond, Palm, Rose, Shakespeare, and Subtropical Gardens.

Dale's presentation gave us a visual tour of the desert garden. The desert garden was filled with many varieties of bromeliads, cactus, and succulents. Palms planted in the desert garden included *Archontophoenix, Brahea, Howea, Livistona, Phoenix*, and *Syagrus*. Cycads planted in the garden included *Cycas, Zamia*, and *Encephalartos* (including a rare and very old *Encephalartos latifrons*). The variety of texture, color, and shape of plants in this garden is truly exceptional.

Encephalartos latifrons

THIS MONTH'S "THANK YOU"

PLANT DONATIONS

Betty Ahlborn
Jack Dewey
Dale Holton
John Irvine

MEETING REFRESHMENTS

Charlie & Brenda Beck
Patrick & Lauren Morris
Tom Ramiccio
Tom & Mary Whisler

SPECIAL THANKS

to
Dennis McKee
for arriving at 5:00 p.m. to keep the Mounts building open for us.

Winner of the January 5th Door Prize was
Robin Crawford
who received a copy of Cold Hardy Palms by Alan W. Meerow.

Please share your garden experiences.
Submit your stories and photos to beck4212@aol.com

Encephalartos natalensis X *Encephalartos woodii*

by Dale Holton

The *Encephalartos natalensis* X *Encephalartos woodii* cross was produced many years ago, possibly in the early 1990's, by the late Mrs. Cynthia Giddy, a well known cycad grower in South Africa. The product of this cross produces a very attractive plant. They are somewhat fast growing and have no special needs. They don't seem to mind if they have irrigation or not and will grow in full sun or shade. If they don't get fertilized, they keep right on growing. This is what I refer to as bullet proof. My plant is about 10-12 years old and is about 5' tall.

Encephalartos natalensis is from Natal, South Africa and was recognized as a species in 1951. There are several forms of this species, each coming from different localities. *E natalensis* is an attractive cycad and is very easy to grow, requiring no special treatments. I have not taken time to learn the different forms and most likely won't. For some reason I have not attempted to acquire plants of this species for sale. It is thought that *E. natalensis* is the closest living relative of *E. woodii*.

Encephalartos woodii is also from Natal, South Africa. There was only one plant of this species ever found and it was a male plant. It was discovered in 1895 by John Medley Wood. The plant was removed from habitat, and taken to botanical gardens, with the Durban Botanical Garden receiving the largest piece. Hundreds of offsets have been produced and distributed to other Botanical Gardens and collectors around the world. The rarity and attractiveness of this plant makes it quite sought after by collectors everywhere. Unrooted offsets sell for $3,000 and up. They are very fragile in this state and frequently die.

It is thought that crossing a *female E. natalensis* with a male *E. woodii* and then crossing the resulting offspring again with *E. woodii* would, over 3-4 generations make plants that were close to 90% *E. woodii*. The resulting generations are assigned a F number, with the first being F1. My plant is an F1 plant. There are now F2 plants coning, so F3 plants are going to be made soon. These F3 plants should look just like the pure *E. woodii*. I recently acquired seeds of the F1 cross that are now starting to germinate.

Fairchild Tropical Garden has specimens of both *E. natalensis* and *E. woodii*. It is well worth the trip to go and see all the rare cycads in this garden. *(See additional photos on pages 10 and 11.)*

***Encephalartos natalensis* leaf detail.**
(Photo by Dale Holton)

***Encephalartos natalensis X Encephalartos woodii* leaf detail.**
(Photo by Dale Holton)

Encephalartos natalensis **growing in the Holton garden.**
(Photo by Dale Holton)

Encephalartos woodii **at Fairchild Tropical Botanical Garden**
(Photo by Charlie Beck)

Encephalartos woodii **leaf detail**
(Photo by Chip Jones)

Palm Beach Palm & Cycad Society
P.O. Box 21-2228
Royal Palm Beach, FL 33421

Palm Beach Palm & Cycad Society

February 2011 Monthly Update