



Palm Beach Palm & Cycad Society

Affiliate of the International Palm Society

Monthly Update

January 2015

UPCOMING MEETING

January 7, 2015
7:30 p.m. at
Mounts Botanical Garden

Speaker: Jeff Searle

Subject: 2012 International Palm
Society Biennial Trip to Thailand

January Featured Auction Plants:

Johannesteijsmannia altifrons
Neoveitchia storckii

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Palm Beach Palm & Cycad Society 2015 Officers & Executive Committee

Tom Ramiccio, President (561) 386-7812
Don Bittel, Vice President (772) 521-4601
Ruth Lynch, Secretary (561) 312-5046
Janice DiPaola, Director & Membership Chair
(561) 748-1918
Ingrid Dewey, Treasurer (561) 791-3300
Charlie Beck, Director & Editor (561) 963-5511
Terry Lynch, Director (561) 582-7378
Gerry Valentini, Director (561) 735-0978
Tom Whisler, Director (561) 627-8328
Betty Ahlborn, Immediate Past President
(561) 798-4562

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Charlie Beck, Librarian
Ruth Lynch, Refreshment Chairman
Brenda Beck, Historian
Brenda LaPlatte, Webmaster

DECEMBER "THANK YOU"

Our sincere thanks to members that participated in our annual holiday party and plant give-away in December. You brought so many wonderful plant donations and the food was out of this world. Thanks for making our holiday party a special one.

VISIT US AT

www.palmbeachpalmcycadsociety.com

All photographs in this issue were provided by Charlie Beck unless otherwise specified.

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.



Dypsis decaryi before collapse from Thielaviopsis Trunk Rot in the Beck garden



After collapse from Thielaviopsis Trunk Rot



68 year old *P. aequatorialis* at Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden



P. aequatorialis in Dale Holton's garden



P. aequatorialis leaf detail



Fruit of *P. aequatorialis*
(Photo submitted to Palm, Pedia by La Tagueria)

Phytelephas aequatorialis



FEATURED THIS MONTH: *Phytelephas aequatorialis*
by Charlie Beck


Phytelephas aequatorialis is a large, solitary, pinnate palm. Its leaflets may be regularly arranged in a single plane, or they can be grouped and arranged in several planes. This is the tallest of the six *Phytelephas* species, it can grow 45' tall but often tops out at 10'. This height refers to palms growing in its tropical, native habitat. In Palm Beach County it is a slow growing palm so don't expect rapid vertical growth. In habitat fronds can measure up to 30' long, even though stems only grow to one foot in diameter. Native habitat ranges from wet, coastal plain to 5000' elevation on the western Andes slope in Columbia, Ecuador and Peru. Most often, *P. aequatorialis* is found in large stands along river banks. Seed is often dispersed by flood water.

The common name for this palm is the Ecuadorean Ivory Palm. Its seed is white and very hard. *P. aequatorialis* is the source of vegetable ivory in Ecuador. Artisans carve figurines from this vegetable ivory. Buttons are also made from this seed. Being a dioecious palm only female plants produce vegetable ivory.

Back in the 1990's, the past president of our Society, Dale Holton, imported vegetable ivory carvings directly from Ecuador. Dale established a relationship with the exporter and eventually obtained some habitat collected seed for growing at Holton Nursery. Some of us palm enthusiasts were lucky to purchase this relatively rare palm from Dale. It was unknown if this tropical palm would grow in Palm Beach County. Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden has only a single specimen of this palm planted in their garden.

We planted our only specimen of *P. aequatorialis* in 2004. It is planted in a shady, low lying area which occasionally floods after repeated heavy rainfall. In ten years it has grown into an impressive specimen. Its fronds measure 18' long. No stem has

(561) 586-2332



LAKE OSBORNE ANIMAL CLINIC

JOHN T. LYNCH, D.V.M.

1502 Lake Osborne Dr.
Lake Worth, FL 33461

yet formed but the base of the palm is approximately one foot in diameter. The leaflets are grouped and are displayed on differing planes. I believe this is the preferred form- much showier than palms with regularly spaced leaflets. Our palm has bloomed for the first time this year. It is a male with long showy inflorescences with large flowers.

Even though the natural range of this palm straddles the equator, this palm has performed well in our sub-tropical garden. There was no noticeable setback of our palm after the record cold winters of 2009 and 2010. Our garden is located 4 miles from the ocean near Lantana, but this palm also thrives at Holton Nursery- also located near Lantana but 7 miles from the coast. Dale Holton has told me that this palm is cold sensitive when grown in pots but is more cold hardy when planted in the ground.

Holton Nursery has a few *P. aequatorialis* available for sale. If you have the space for this beautiful palm in your garden you should give it a try. It will certainly attract a lot of attention. With regular irrigation and fertilization it will grow a magnificent crown of fronds. Vertical growth will take decades of growth which is probably good when considering the large crown growing on such a small stem and the likelihood of needing to survive a hurricane.



Village Marina

396 Torpey Road
Fort Pierce, Florida. 34946

Wes Taylor

Office 772-464-4391 Cell 772-519-1297

HOLTON NURSERY
PALMS and CYCADS

5221 3rd Road
Lake Worth, Fl. 33467
Phone (561) 965-6792
Email cycadnut@gate.net



"By appointment only"

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Thielaviopsis Trunk Rot by Charlie Beck

This year we had a *Syagrus sancona* suddenly die in our garden. This palm looked healthy. It was freely blooming and producing seed. One day I noticed the whole crown of the palm fold over just below the bud. My initial thought was that there was some kind of mechanical damage which caused the demise of this palm. I ruled out lightning damage because no burning was evident and this palm was planted under taller palms which showed no damage. I thought that maybe a family of raccoons might have had a party hanging off the crown and this might have been the cause of this palm's death.

A few months later one of my *Dypsis decaryi* toppled over just like the *S. sancona*. This was a tall palm with a stem 2-3 times the size of the *S. sancona*, so I couldn't blame its death on playful raccoons. Again this palm was actively producing healthy fronds and fruit. It was a 15 year old specimen which was one of a pair which announced a garden, path entrance. I was a little more concerned losing this palm so I decided to do a little research and find out what caused its sudden death.

What I found on an EDIS website was Thielaviopsis Trunk Rot. The paper which described this palm disease was authored by Dr. Monica Elliott who has given several presentations at our meetings. I found that my two palm deaths were caused by *Thielaviopsis paradoxa*, a fungus that can infect any part of a palm, and cause numerous diseases- most notably, bud rot or trunk rot. Either the palm stem collapses on itself or the palm canopy suddenly falls off the stem. The palm canopy often appears healthy prior to the collapse.

Even though I noticed no stem injury on my two palms, the fungus typically enters through a stem injury along the upper third of its height. If the disease is detected early, the palm might be saved by cutting out the infested wood and treating with a fungicide. There are no other methods to prevent or cure this disease. They recommend to remove the diseased stem immediately- don't add to the compost pile.

The examples they show on the website of this sudden death include the palms: *Washingtonia robusta*, *Cocos nucifera*, and *Phoenix canariensis*. They also show photos of rotted stem cross-sections and oozing stem wounds. If you require positive iden-



Side view of collapsed stem of *Dypsis decaryi*

tification you need to remove a section of rotted stem so that ID could be made by laboratory diagnosis.

Fungus can enter the palm by cracks in the stem caused by excessive water intake. Insects (ambrosia beetle etc.), birds (sapsuckers etc.), rats and other mammals might cause a wound which may be an entry point for the fungus. Wind damage or humans with climbing spikes might also cause an entry point.

Fungal spores can be spread by the wind or various forms of wildlife in the garden. It seems that death by this disease can be quite random. I hope the Beck Palm Garden does not transform into the Beck Ornamental Garden (other than palms) in the coming years due to this affliction.

If you want to read more on this subject see website address listed below.

<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pp143>

HAPPY NEW YEAR