

New Cycad Discovery in Colombia

An exciting cycad discovery to report: A new *Zamia* from the Eastern Cordillera Mountain Range of Huila, Colombia. The new species was recently described by Montgomery cycad biologist Michael Calonje along with colleagues (see citation below) from the TOLI herbarium, Jardín Botánico José Celestino Mutis, Universidad Surcolombiana, and the New York Botanical Garden

Before this fieldwork, only three specimens had been collected and these collections occurred prior to 1945! Records on this species were scarce. Very little was known about its appearance, its habitat, the extent of its distribution, or its conservation status. In fact, it was unclear whether or not the species went extinct!

Supported by a grant from the Association of Zoological Horticulture, the botanists set out to scout the Eastern Cordillera of Huila near the area where the species had last been collected almost 70 years ago. This region is now largely deforested. Fortunately, small remnants of forest near steep ravines and rivers had been spared, and there the team found healthy, reproductive populations.

Detailed study in the field verified that the mysterious cycad was indeed a distinct species, and it was named *Zamia huilensis* to honor its native department of Huila.

Zamia huilensis has similar reproductive structures to *Zamia tolimensis* from neighboring Tolima (see Spring 2012 Newsletter), but leaflets that are more similar to *Zamia muricata* from the Eastern plains of Colombia. It is much smaller

than the gigantic *Zamia tolimensis* and differs in leaflet shape, whereas it differs from *Z. muricata* in its habit (arborescent vs. subterranean) and the shape and color of its cones.

Zamia huilensis is the fourth new species of *Zamia* described in Colombia in as many years, indicating that Colombia's highly diverse flora still holds surprises!

Citation: Calonje, M., H. E. Esquivel, G. Morales, Y. A. Mora-Lizcano, and D. Stevenson. 2012. A new arborescent species of *Zamia* (Cycadales, Zamiaceae) from the Department of Huila, Eastern Cordillera of Colombia. *Caldasia* 34:283-290.



Above: Hector Esquivel, Michael Calonje and Gustavo Morales with *Zamia huilensis*



Zamia huilensis survives in fragmented forest habitats, where most habitat has been cleared for pasture and agriculture. The seeds of this new species are bright orange when mature, whereas most *Zamia* seeds are red at maturity.