

Martinique and St. Lucia 2007

Expedition Report
Karen Laubengayer
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Florida International University graduate student Karen Laubengayer just returned from her final collection trip to Martinique and St. Lucia in the Lesser Antilles. With the help of her assistant, FTBG volunteer Lynne Rittenberg, they collected research material from 36 *Aiphanes minima* (Arecaceae) trees for Karen's thesis, which will later be stored as dried specimens in the Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden Herbarium. Duplicate vouchers were left in St. Lucia's Forestry Department Herbarium. Karen's thesis studies have taken her to Barbados (where she has also left vouchers in their Herbarium), Dominica, Martinique, St. Lucia and St. Vincent. *Aiphanes minima* is a spiny palm that grows throughout the Lesser Antilles. Throughout history, botanists have argued whether there is only one or several species on the different islands. Under the direction of Karen's research adviser Dr. Scott Zona, Fairchild Palm Biologist, her thesis will determine if there is more than a single species of this palm in the Lesser Antilles by studying morphological and anatomical variation. Accompanying Karen's most recent collections, a total of 79 DNA samples were collected for future molecular work.



Karen collecting wild palms in the forest on St. Lucia.

Support for this research has been provided by the Central Florida Palm and Cycad Society, Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden, Montgomery Botanical Center, and South Florida Palm Society. In return for their support, seedlings representing populations of *Aiphanes minima* on these islands will be provided for each organization. Additional funding has been provided from Florida International University through scholarship funds: Judith Evans Parker Travel Scholarship, and the Loyd Kelly Travel Grant.



Karen with Melvin Smith, a local field guide in St. Lucia.

Lynne Rittenberg and Virginie "Chris" Sealy in the St. Lucia Forestry Herbarium looking at herbarium specimens.



Lynne Rittenberg behind a young *Aiphanes* in the forest on St. Lucia.