

A Living Treasure on Mona Island

Pseudophoenix sargentii is found in many places in the Caribbean Basin. In the Florida Keys it is known as the Buccaneer Palm. Where it does occur, the populations tend to be small, with only a few palms in each place. Experts believe two circumstances imperil the species – the palm is visually striking and slow growing, prompting removal of mature plants for landscaping.

Mona is a remote, uninhabited island halfway between Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. Writers sometimes compare Mona to the Galapagos, perhaps from the venerable beasts on both. The Island's history includes the Taíno, Ponce de Leon, Captain Kidd – and Dr. N. L. Britton. Britton authored the first botanical report on Mona in 1915. Over the next century, reports about palms on Mona were quite varied. Some counted two dozen *Pseudophoenix* plants, some claimed fewer – one alarming paper claimed only one palm was left!

This record inspires study and conservation of these fascinating palms. The International Palm Society provided a very generous grant, and with this support, I teamed up with three experts: Eugenio Santiago (University of Puerto Rico), Jose Sustache (Departamento de Recursos Naturales y Ambientales of Puerto Rico), and Javier Francisco-Ortega (FIU and FTBG). I was grateful for these ideal colleagues, with expertise on palm conservation genetics, the Caribbean flora and extensive experience on Mona.

Over several days of fieldwork, we thoroughly documented these rare palms on Mona Island – we took specimens, detailed notes and photographs – and collected seeds for conservation. Our findings can now provide detailed answers to basic questions about *Pseudophoenix* on Mona – how many palms grow on the island, are they imperiled and what can we do? Our work can lead to better understanding and protection of other *Pseudophoenix* populations as well as these intriguing Mona Island palms.

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Eugenio, Jose and Javier with *Pseudophoenix sargentii*



Patrick measuring a specimen



The Mona Ground Iguana is found no other place