

Montgomery Botanical NEWS

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Advancing Research, Conservation, and Education through Scientific Plant Collections

Palms are always essential, and in West Africa this is easily seen. MULTIPALMS, an innovative African-led and Swiss-funded initiative, is studying the myriad ways communities use these living treasures, documenting the biology and diversity of the native palm flora, and developing ways to increase and *multiply* these critical resources for sustainable use.

I was privileged to join with the Multipalms team for field missions over the last two years. Working with a broadly international group of experts – from Benin, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, and Switzerland – I brought US participation to the team, as well as seeds of many palms at Montgomery, which now grow at botanic gardens and universities throughout West Africa.

Integrating biogeography with ethnobotany and horticulture, we learned from local experts on how palms provide food, fiber and furniture, while providing solid documentation of

where and how these palms grow in natural areas.

These experiences broadened my view of palm biology and how critically these plants provide both prosperity and beauty; it also provided cherished new diversity for Montgomery's collection. Just as we shared seeds in both directions across the

Atlantic, we can also exchange our knowledge – what I learned in Africa is mirrored by what my teammates will gain from a visit to Montgomery. Plans are developing for a study visit later this year.

Multipalms: Palm Science and Conservation in West Africa



I am deeply grateful, especially to the Multipalms leadership: Doudjo Outtara, Patrick Ekpe, Kifouli Adeoti and Hospice Dassou. I also thank Fred Stauffer and Didier Roguet for their expertise, as well as the countless local authorities, officials, and leaders who welcomed us and shared their palms, goodwill and time. My participation was funded by Montgomery's Plant Exploration Fund and a grant from Audemars Piguet Foundations to Multipalms.

M. Patrick Griffith, Executive Director

Left Photo: Collecting *Raphia palma-pinus* seeds with a petiole from the same palm, in Ankasa National Park, Ghana. *Raphia* palms hold the record for the longest leaves and longest leaflets in the entire plant kingdom. This leaf stalk alone was longer than our pole saw, and so we utilized it to reach the seed held high off the ground.

Background photo: The Multipalms team in the savannas near Yamoussoukro, Cote d'Ivoire, with a mature *Borassus aethiopum*.