Montgomery Botanical NEWS

Advancing Research, Conservation, and Education through Scientific Plant Collections

Spring/Summer 2014 *Volume 22, Number 1*

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To advance science, education & conservation of tropical plants, emphasizing palms and cycads, Montgomery Botanical Center grows living plants from around the world in population-based, documented, scientific collections in a 120-acre botanical garden exemplifying excellent landscape design.

Montgomery Botanical Center is a tax-exempt, nonprofit institution established by Eleanor "Nell" Montgomery Jennings in memory of her husband, Colonel Robert H. Montgomery, and his love of palms and cycads.

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11901 Old Cutler Road
Coral Gables, Florida 33156

Phone 305.667.3800
Fax 305.661.5984

mbc@montgomerybotanical.org
www.montgomerybotanical.org

Edited by Tracy Magellan

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From the Executive Director

Dear Friends,

Montgomery keeps moving forward! So many exciting things are happening right now – fieldwork, horticulture and botany. It was hard to choose what to highlight in these twelve pages!

Expeditions for research and conservation are moving straight ahead. You saw Larry Noblick with a very interesting palm on the cover, and his work is featured on pages 4 and 5. As I write this letter, Larry is still afield in Brazil, making new discoveries and collections. Chad Husby shares his recent work with a unique palm on pages 6 and 7. Right now Michael Calonje and I are organizing our gear for a cycad expedition in Belize – we depart in two days.

These treasured plants advance botany in a very direct way. The facing page highlights our Research Fellows, and the innovative science they bring to Montgomery. Putting their rare expertise to work on our plant collection leads to great things! Some of the exciting scholarship at Montgomery is also featured on page 8.

Our ability to advance this unique and important work is due to your very generous support and colleagueship. I am deeply grateful for everyone who is working with us and providing the critical funding we need to move forward. You can see the great breadth of Montgomery's supporters on pages 10 and 11, and our AWESOME volunteer corps on page 9. Everyone on our team appreciates your help greatly – and we all work hard to make maximum use of your gifts and effort.

I look forward to updating you in future newsletters! Please also take a look at our website, or call, write or visit – I always appreciate seeing you here.

Pictured: Dr. Griffith at Montgomery.

Montgomery's Microscopic Mysteries:

Research Fellows take a closer look

It is the closest possible look at Montgomery! Three experts, James Clugston, Boglarka Erdei, and Barry Tomlinson, bring new techniques, ideas and perspectives. As a group, their field is *Cycad Structural Biology*, but their work shows a nice diversity of the ways that Montgomery's plant collection can help advance botany.

James Clugston: For the last three years, James has traveled from the UK, while completing his Bachelors and Masters Degrees, to study Montgomery's collections. James is using the plant collections to survey diversity in *Dioon* leaf surfaces, to determine how they can be used for identification. The research involves the MBC team and also Dr. Andrew Vovides of the Jardin Botanico Francisco Clavijero (Xalapa, Mexico), a longtime collaborator. "The cycad collection at MBC is of true scientific importance and has been invaluable to my early research career," said James. "I look forward to collaborations for many years to come." James's work at Montgomery is supported by the Kelly Botanical Research Fellows Program, which is generously funded by the Kelly Foundation.

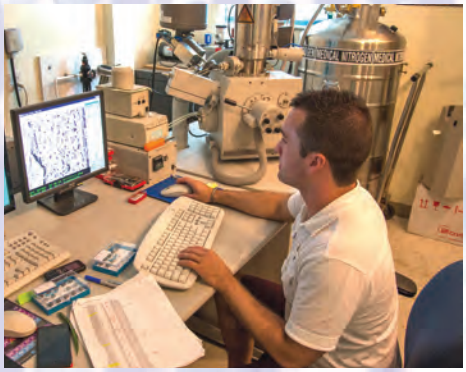
Boglarka Erdei: An expert on fossil cycads, Dr. Erdei is using Montgomery's plants to classify ancient extinct cycads. Boglarka is Chief Museologist at the Hungarian Natural History Museum in Budapest. Boglarka is working closely with MBC Cycad Biologist Michael Calonje to create a set of reference images and measurements of cycad leaflet cells. Boglarka states: "MBC's exceptional living cycad collection provided me the necessary clues and conclusive evidence to identify the first 30 million year-old fossils of *Zamia*, the second largest genus of cycads." Her year-long Fellowship at Montgomery is funded by the Hungarian American Enterprise Scholarship Fund.

Barry Tomlinson: A veteran anatomist in both the national and the local botanical world, Barry returned to continue his anthology of cycad anatomy. In anticipation of his winter here, Dr. Tomlinson shipped his three best microscopes ahead of his arrival! Great progress is already made – see page 8 – and new findings are now being compiled. Barry's Fellowship is also generously funded by the Kelly Botanical Research Fellows Program. Barry remarks:

> As one proceeds with a large collection of cycads at hand and readily made available for microscopic study, one contrasts what is described in the literature with what one finds on a daily basis looking at all parts of cycads. One begins to appreciate the contrast between old and new information. The latter is beginning to reveal major and highly significant data about hitherto unsuspected aspects of the structural and hence functional biology of cycads. It is a new era for cycad biology!

Having these three anatomists – from different nations and generations – all together with our collections creates a great cycad camaraderie. Seeing their collaborative approach to discovery inspires the MBC team to keep doing what it does best: grow exceptional plants that these experts can study.

Boglarka Erdei working in the Chris Tyson Plant Conservation Building at MBC.



James Clugston working at the University of Miami SEM Laboratory.

Barry Tomlinson working in the Microscope Room at MBC.

Please see MontgomeryTV for a video featuring these Research Fellows:

http://www.youtube.com/user/MontgomeryBotanical

Searching for Syagrus

Larry Noblick collecting *Syagrus lilliputiana* in Mato Grosso do Sul.

Somewhere in the distant past, the coconut and its sister genus *Syagrus* shared a common ancestor in South America. Many of these coconut relatives are poorly known local endemics growing in fragmented cerrados and rocky campo rupestre areas of central Brazil. My trip objective was to explore these lesser known *Syagrus*, many of which are threatened by the widespread cultivation of soybeans and sugarcane.

In southwestern Goiás state, Harri Lorenzi and I found a cerrado fragment that had been preserved by a local soybean grower as required by Brazilian law. Compared to the thousands of acres cleared to plant horizon to horizon soybean fields, it is not much. Yet, in this small fragment we discovered a little-known species. In the neighboring 30,000 hectare Parque Nacional das Emas, we discovered yet another unknown species.

Next we searched and found a new species in the Parque Nacional da Chapada dos Guimarães in the state of Mato Grosso (see photo at top right). Our truck broke down as we left the park, leaving us with no power steering, unable to charge the battery and no fan to cool the engine. We were stranded for the rest of the day and over half of the next while we waited for the broken part to be delivered.

We then drove to Niquelândia (a nickel rich region) in northern Goiás to see *S. longipedunculata*, which I had not yet seen in the field. We proceeded south the next morning and collected several samples of *S. glazioviana* and confirmed that anatomically that they were all the same. This helped us to also confirm that the new species near Goiania was just another *S. glazioviana*.

Next, I traveled with Ricardo Pimenta, who had recently discovered and described a new species (*S. pompeoi*) from Bela Vista, Mato Grosso do Sul. We also discovered the first known population of *S. loefgrenii* in Mato Grosso do Sul and found *S. lilliputiana* (see photo above), along with several other poorly known species of *Syagrus* and *Butia*.

In exploring the state of Minas Gerais, Harri and I found additional populations of *S. angustifolia*, more of the *S. glazioviana* complex and collected different forms of *S. minor*. We searched for them in a remote cerrado – over 100 miles of dirt road – between Chapada Gaucha and Montalvania in northern Minas Gerais, and gained a greater understanding of these species. We proceeded south to Serra do Cabral near Joaquin Felicio and investigated a new diminutive palm species growing just outside of the state park. It was close to dusk when we arrived at the population (cover photo). Its iron specific soil requirements made it difficult to locate, especially since part of the population had been destroyed by mining interests (background photo). In the search for this palm, we accidently locked the keys in the car, forcing us to break a window.

During just the first month of this expedition, we managed to travel over 11,000 km (ca. 6,900 miles) in five different states in search of these fascinating palms! Thanks again to MBC and the many donors (pages 10 and 11) who help to make this field research possible.

Larry Noblick, Ph.D., Palm Biologist
larryn@montgomerybotanical.org

Hidden remote palms illuminate the coconut's family tree

Larry Noblick collecting a new species at Parque Nacional da Chapada dos Guimarães in the state of Mato Grosso.

Larry in a "field" of *Syagrus minor*.

Background: Removal of surface iron ore is threatening the survival of a newly discovered species.

Coccothrinax Challenge

New palms for our gardens

The flora of the island of Hispaniola, of which the Dominican Republic comprises two thirds, is very rich and includes over 2,000 endemic species. Like South Florida it is part of the Caribbean region, so many Dominican plants will thrive under our conditions. Our 2012 Dominican Republic expedition was a great success, building on longstanding collaborations among botanical gardens. In 2013, thanks to ongoing support by Dr. Lin Lougheed, a second expedition was mounted to further explore the botanical treasures of this beautiful country. MBC once again teamed up with the Jardín Botánico Nacional Dr. Rafael Ma. Moscoso of the Dominican Republic (JBSD) and Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden (FTBG) to collect a wide diversity of plants in the Dominican Republic to advance conservation, science and horticulture.

A major focus of the expedition was to collect a beautiful new palm for MBC's collections, *Coccothrinax boschiana*. This palm grows near the sea coast on the jagged limestone slopes of the Sierra Martin Garcia. Adapted to life near the sea and buffeted by storms, heat, humidity and drought, this palm

Top: *Coccothrinax boschiana* in the Sierra Martin Garcia.
Center: Chad Husby surveying a population of *Coccothrinax boschiana*.
Bottom: The beautiful silver hue of *Coccothrinax boschiana leaves*.

will be perfectly adapted to growing at Montgomery in all seasons. It is a very ornamental species with leaves of gold and silver hue atop tall thin stems adapted to bending with strong onshore winds and even hurricanes, which regularly strike the Dominican Republic.

Reaching *Coccothrinax boschiana* was the first challenge of our expedition. It grows in a hot, dry forest region southwest of the capital, Santo Domingo, where we were staying. Before embarking, we picked up Alberto Veloz, the curator of the herbarium at JBSD, who guided us to the site. After several hours of driving, we reached the vicinity of the Sierra Martin Garcia. In a village we hired a local guide to assist us with navigating and collecting. Roads to the site were unpaved and often overgrown with very spiny vegetation, including unusual cacti. When the roads became impassible, even with our guide walking in front of the truck and cutting away the impeding branches and saplings, we continued on foot. A major concern was taking in sufficient water for the long hot climb to the palms. The palms grow on steep slopes and ridges of often jagged dogtooth limestone. Thus, great care was needed to reach them. The white limestone also reflected and radiated heat and sunlight, making us feel as though we were in an oven. We also needed to carry all our collecting gear and protective clothing against the prickly vegetation and sun.

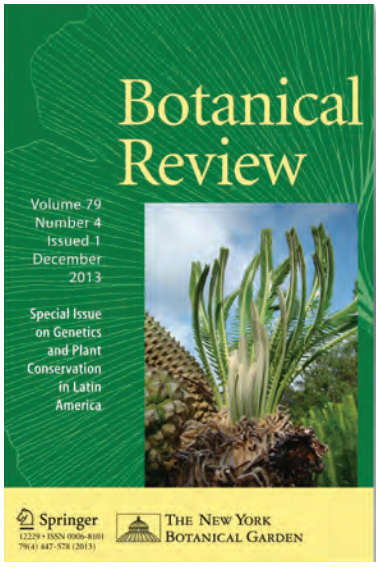
Fortunately, the dramatic beauty of the landscape and palms compensated for the physical challenges. When we reached the palms, we were at first disappointed to find that most of the fruiting stalks were barren of seeds. Some of the seeds that remained on the stalks had been partly eaten away or dried out. After much diligent searching, we did find what looked like viable seeds on a few individuals. The heights of the palms proved a challenge, but fortunately we had along an extendable pruner that allowed us to detach the fruiting stalks gently so as not to dislodge the seeds. After the initial collecting, we explored the site further looking for more seeds and assessing the population. We also collected herbarium specimens, took many photos and collected a few other plants of interest growing in the vicinity. However, despite our careful provisioning, we started to run out of water as the day wore on, so we decided to return. It was a successful beginning to what was a very successful expedition.

Later in the trip, our team collected the first documented wild-origin seed of the emblematic *Zombia antillarum* to be grown in South Florida's major botanic gardens. Other notable palm collections were *Copernicia berteroana* and *Sabal domingensis*, a giant palm first introduced by the the 2012 expedition. Other important collections included the spikey-leafed endangered conifer *Podocarpus hispaniolensis* and the very rare large evergreen *Plumeria magna*, both of which are completely new introductions to horticulture. The more than 100 species collected during this expedition will enrich the botanical collections of Florida and the Dominican Republic for years to come. Already, many of these collections, including those described above, are happily growing, and we expect them to make beautiful and scientifically important additions to our collections. All of this was made possible by the collaborative spirit, enthusiasm and hard work of the participants, the support of our parent institutions and the generosity of our benefactor Dr. Lin Lougheed. We hope to return to the Dominican Republic again one day to explore and collect more of the amazing plants that call the beautiful country home.

Chad Husby, Ph.D.
Collections Manager and Botanist
chad@montgomerybotanical.org

Horticulture, Botany and Gardens

Montgomery featured in each field!



Montgomery's Work Made the Cover of These Recent Journals

Hortscience: Vickie Murphy and her colleagues from Montgomery (**Chad Husby** and **Patrick Griffith**) and the University of Florida (**Kim Moore**) published a detailed study of seed germination in *Zamia*. The research examined the best media for growing *Zamia pumila*, the leaf featured on the cover.

Botanical Review: The cover shows *Microcycas calocoma*, one of MBC's treasured cycads. This issue, focused on genetics and plant conservation in Latin America, was guest edited by **Patrick**, **Angelica Cibrian Jaramillo** of LangeBio (Mexico), and **Javier Francisco-Ortega** of Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden (FTBG).

Public Garden: Evelyn Hoyos (MBC Service Learner and Miami Dade College Student) and **Vickie** are shown on the cover at the Loyd G. Kelly Conservation Nursery. The feature article by **Tracy Magellan** highlighted ways that botanic gardens work with college students.

Research Updates

Barry Tomlinson and his colleagues at Montgomery (**Tracy** and **Patrick**) published a large-scale study of cycad anatomy, in the International Journal of Plant Sciences. The work was generously supported by the Kelly Foundation.

The most accurate cycad family tree to date was published by **Alan Meerow** (USDA Chapman Field) and his colleagues (**Dayana Salas-Leiva**, **Michael Calonje**, **Dennis Stevenson**, **Kyoko Nakamura**, **Carl Lewis**, **Sandra Namoff**, **Patrick**, and **Javier**) from FIU, FTBG, The New York Botanical Garden and Montgomery. The study, funded by the National Science Foundation and the Christiane Tyson Research Fellowship, appears in Annals of Botany. The relationships among these ancient genera are now well understood through this important work, which used MBC's cycad collection.

Natalie Prior, Ph.D. Student from the University of Victoria (Canada), pictured here, has just made very interesting discoveries using the MBC cycad collection. She recently presented her findings at a public seminar at Montgomery. Her research on pollination drops represents a very specific and unique use of these living plants.

Thank You to Our 2013 Volunteers

Aguirre, Helio
Alfaro, Jacqueline
Alvarez, Andrew
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Boy Scout Eagle Projects-
Wesley Groves
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UM HOPE
UM Outreach Orientation
UM Ghandi Day of Service
Verdecia, Richard
Walls, Jake
Wheeler, Benjamin
Wheeler, Jack
Witcher, Brian

We also thank our directors (listed on page 2) who volunteer their time, talents and efforts.

Team News

Joe Hibbard of Sasaki and Associates (right center), MBC's longtime Landscape Architect, was awarded membership into the 2013 Council of Fellows by The American Society of Landscape Architects. The designation of Fellow is a high honor conferred on individuals in recognition of exceptional accomplishments over a sustained period of time. Joe's excellent work designing the Montgomery Master Plan and his sustained guidance since 1992 was highlighted among his best work.

This spring, Montgomery welcomes two new Miami Dade College Horticulture Interns, **Marvin Rodriguez** and **Martin Granja**. Marvin is working with the palm collection and Martin is working with the conifers and trees. They are both enrolled in Miami Dade College's Landscape & Horticultural Technology Program.

Miami Dade College students, Gregory Sirris and Luis Santana, volunteering with Vickie Murphy.

Would you like to volunteer?
To volunteer to help Montgomery contact Tracy Magellan.
(305)667-3800 ext. 114
tracym@montgomerybotanical.org

Montgomery Botanical Center 2013 Collection Inventory

	Palms	Cycads	Other
Total Taxa	430	247	729
in ground	375	234	579
in nursery	135	69	240
Total Accessions	2,280	1,916	2,522
in ground	2,020	1,733	2,235
in nursery	385	417	337
Total Plants	10,065	7,978	3,996
in ground	6,186	4,584	2,688
in nursery	3,879	3,394	1,308

Montgomery Botanical Center
Gratefully Acknowledges Your 2013 Support

TO STUDY CYCAD CONSERVATION COLLECTIONS
Institute for Museum & Library Services

GIFTS TO ENDOW LANDSCAPE DESIGN FUND
Walter Haynes

FELLOWSHIP IN CONSERVATION HORTICULTURE
Elizabeth Ordway Dunn Foundation

GRANT TO CONSERVE CYCADS
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Lin Lougheed
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Michael Marika

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GRANT FOR CARIBBEAN CYCAD PROJECT
National Science Foundation (through FIU)

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American Conifer Society

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Patrick & Tonya Griffith

IN MEMORY OF FRED MEISTER, & GENEVIEVE & CHALMER "BUD" MOORE
Patrick & Tonya Griffith

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Banyan Tree Service
Jack Bauer
Cub Scout Pack 336
Nora Denslow
Kay Jacobson
Dennis Stevenson
Parks Tree Service

Montgomery apologizes for any omissions or errors in accuracy

Groundwork for the Garden

Jill Menzel donates sidewalks to the nursery

Jill Menzel has supported many projects at Montgomery Botanical Center! She donated the interior lab space for the Chris Tyson Plant Conservation Building, had a series of hoops constructed to mount a collection of *Zamia pseudoparasitica* in the shadehouse and has supported travel for a variety of conferences and botanical expeditions.

Her latest project supported a series of sidewalks improving the nursery. Now the Montgomery Team – staff and volunteers – can roll plants from the greenhouse, to the shadehouse, to the full sun nursery making the operation safer and more efficient.

UNRESTRICTED FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

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CORAL GABLES
THE CITY BEAUTIFUL

FROM THE MONTGOMERY ARCHIVE

Colonel Robert H. Montgomery and Nell Montgomery with *Dypsis lutescens*, commonly known as the bamboo palm or the areca palm. This plant was one of eight palms purchased by Robert Montgomery on September 14, 1932 from Mr. J. E. Hendry, Jr.

Colonel Montgomery paid $4 for six seven foot palms and $5 for two eight foot palms. Though areca palms are commonly used locally as hedges in landscaping, they are originally from Madagascar where they are rare and endangered. This palm is still on the property and is now much larger (see photo on right).