Montgomery Botanical NEWS

Spring/Summer 2020 Volume 28, Number 1

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Advancing Research, Conservation, and Education through Scientific Plant Collections

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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From the Executive Director

Dear Friends,

Botany is a science of discovery. 400,000 plant species are known; perhaps another 100,000 are yet undiscovered. Many new finds are hidden, diminutive and obscure – so imagine the thrill of new palms and cycads! It is amazing that grand, beautiful plants are still to be found: pages 4 and 5 show three of our most recent finds.

Whether new or old, these cherished species face many threats. Keeping palms and cycads in gardens is often the best protection. The facing page shows a major advancement in this botanic garden conservation work – new genetic evidence that gardens working together do so much more than working alone. Montgomery's leadership is critical to this novel concept.

I am also happy to share some images and stories from our recent explorations in Australia (page 6) and Mexico (page 8). Our work demands that we go to the distant places where palms and cycads thrive. Space only allows two of these stories in these pages, but future issues will feature our work in Crete, Colombia, Brazil, Namibia and elsewhere. We go far and wide in search of green treasures!

PS: Please see more wonderful news and historic content on our newly redesigned website – montgomerybotanical.org

Pictured: Dr. Griffith with *Cycas cairnsiana*, perhaps the bluest of Australian Cycads (see page 6). **On the Cover:** *Cycas couttsiana* is an impressive cycad from tropical Queensland (also see page 6).

Conservation through Collaboration

Montgomery's work helps protect trees nationwide

New thinking for botanic gardens: The outcomes of Montgomery's National Leadership Project are now published and shared. The report – *Toward the Metacollection* – summarizes and highlights the findings of 3 years of scientific efforts from 25 experts at 16 organizations in the US and abroad.

The 12-page guide summarizes the results and lessons learned from intensive review and novel genetic studies of this fundamental need. "The results all point in one direction," states Patrick Griffith, who led the project, "Gardens need to work together to save plants."

Montgomery's research in the last decade provides scientific evidence of how deliberate conservation planning is important for a plant collection. The current study took Montgomery's efforts with palms and cycads even further, and also brought in examples of oaks, magnolias and hibiscus to see if these methods could be expanded to help all botanic gardens. The project also adapted methods used by zoos to protect rare animals as a shared global resource – a novel way to think about plants!

This line of work continues with a new grant (MG-60-19-0064-19, 2019-2022) awarded to Chicago Botanic Garden, which further explores the use of zoo software and genetic data to steward plants collaboratively. Montgomery is partnered with Chicago to compare palm genetics to pedigree records from our extensive database.

We are grateful to the Institute of Museum and Library Services for supporting this project (MG-30-16-0085-16), and to a long list of participating gardens, zoos, associations, and individuals who participated in the research – See the report for a complete list!

INSTITUTE of Museum and Library SERVICES

The project brought together many experts to find the best solutions to conserving genetic diversity in botanic gardens. This meeting at the Morton Arboretum was essential to producing the final report.

The report is free and available online at montgomerybotanical.org

Background: Growing plants in groups, such as these palms near Royal Lake, helps capture better levels of genetic diversity. Combining these groups among gardens can do an even better job.

A Science of Discovery

Montgomery brings new species to light

An exploratory pursuit

Montgomery's experts steadily work to find palms and cycads that have thus far escaped scientific inspection. Here, we present three of these most recent botanical novelties, the latest in a thriving program of field studies. Getting out to the distant lands where new plants hide is essential, but in fact some of these discoveries are much closer to home!

***Sabal lougheediana* only grows on one limestone terrace in Bonaire. Threatened by exotic herbivores, seedlings at Montgomery are critical to help this species survive.**

Among the rarest of palms

Fieldwork over the last three years found every single native *Sabal* palm in the Netherlands Antilles. Montgomery's Dr. Griffith worked with local botanist Quirijn Coolen on these surveys in Bonaire. These studies provide an important conservation plan for the unique palm flora of these islands. The detailed, rigorous survey also presented an opportunity to carefully compare these island palms to each other and to other specimens known from the Caribbean.

Despite the rich tradition of biological research in Bonaire, Griffith was surprised to learn that his 2017 specimens were the very first *Sabal* collected on that island *for any herbarium*. Palms on Bonaire stand taller and thinner than the *Sabal antillensis* in Curacao, hold their leaf segments in a stiffer manner, bear distinctive leaf scars, and show more frequent leaflet fibers under the microscope.

This careful look prompted the survey team to give the Bonaire Palms their own scientific name, *Sabal lougheediana*. Thusly named, these palms immediately joined the rarest of all palms worldwide, as surveys found only 25 mature plants in a very small area. Montgomery's findings were shared with the Bonaire government, now working to preserve these living treasures. Seedlings growing at Montgomery and at the Echo Foundation in Bonaire are also essential for survival of this handsome species.

A cycad from the Amazon

Dr. Calonje's explorations for cycads take him far and wide (see page 8), but he had not yet seen *Zamia* from the remotest part of Brazil. A botany student, Rosane Segalla, alerted Calonje to plants she found during her field studies on pollination ecology. The cycads here grew in the transition zone between tropical savanna and rainforest, and were very poorly known.

Rosane Segalla discovered the new cycad species *Zamia brasiliensis* in a remote part of the Amazon.

A careful look at the scant specimens from this region suggested the Amazon cycads were somewhat like *Zamia ulei* and *Zamia boliviana*, but had much larger leaves, and were free of the prickles often found on *Zamia*. Segalla and Calonje decided to call the new species *Zamia brasiliensis*, as it is the only cycad that is endemic to Brazil.

Detailed study of where this *Zamia brasiliensis* is found led the authors to conclude that it is officially Endangered, given the rates of habitat loss in the Amazon and Cerrado regions where it grows. Detailed ecological studies by Segalla offer further insight on how to best protect this rare find.

These three *Coccothrinax viridescens* greeted zoo visitors for many years. Now, Montgomery's experts have found they are in fact a new species!

Hiding in plain sight

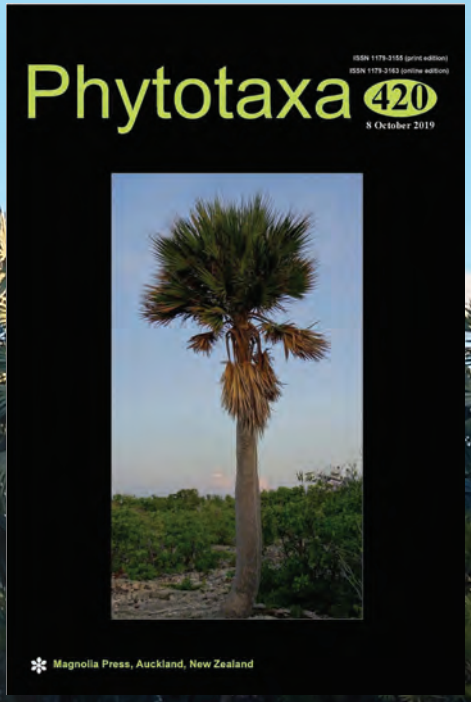
Prior to joining Montgomery, Andrew Street paid close attention to an unusual palm with short petioles and a compact fruit stalk that were growing at a few nurseries in the area. These palms were sometimes called "Cuban Short Petiole" to highlight their distinguishing character and supposed origin. The largest of these grew next to the Zoo Miami entrance, passed by abundant crowds daily.

Street kept tracking down these unusual palms, eventually finding them in seven places around South Florida. Enlisting the help of Montgomery's palm expert Dr. Larry Noblick, careful review of their shape and characters showed the palms belonged to the genus *Coccothrinax*. But, their uniqueness and rarity led Noblick and Street to decide these palms needed their own new name.

The native habitat of this new species, *Coccothrinax viridescens*, is still a mystery – it may be surviving in an unknown location or perhaps it is extinct in the wild. This palm joins a number of other important discoveries made from living collections at gardens – such as the famous Montgomery Palm described in 1957 from plants growing here at Montgomery.

Take a closer look

Finding a new species often means taking a closer look at plants that others have looked past. You can also take a closer look at these discoveries on our website. Scientific descriptions of these new discoveries are provided as free, online resources through the generosity of Montgomery's supporters (pages 10 and 11) – please see montgomerybotanical.org for links.



Searching for Cycads in the Outback

Australian botany is a world apart. Amazing habitats and broad horizons host plants unlike anywhere else. Australia's cycad flora is no exception; with more genera than any other single landmass, these living treasures are a compelling draw for research.

In May 2019, I had the unique opportunity to help with a novel survey of *Cycas* diversity in Australia, working with experts Nathalie Nagaligum and Manuel Lujan Anzola of the California Academy of Sciences. Nathalie and Manuel use advanced DNA techniques to study conservation of these remote relics. Montgomery needs that information to help better conserve cycads – thus I eagerly signed up!

Searching for cycads in the outback brings the enormity of that landscape into focus; daylong unpaved roads, bivouacs among wattles, and scarce mobile phone signals. Our on-the-ground efforts were aided first by Manuel's deft drone piloting, and then *by airlift* from a friendly stockwoman.

With seedlings germinating at Montgomery and copious samples at the CalAcademy, the project is already a major success. The work continues this year, to lay a foundation for better understanding and conservation of these captivating and amazing plants.

M. Patrick Griffith, Executive Director
patrick@montgomerybotanical.org

Australian plants are not as famous as the animals, but are just as spectacular. Here, a kangaroo peers out from a stand of *Cycas cairnsiana*, under a canopy of eucalyptus trees. Page 2 also shows this stunningly blue cycad.

Parked under a tall cycad, Manuel carefully packs plant specimens at the end of a long field day. Numerous DNA samples, herbarium specimens and seeds were paired with GPS data, photographs and notes to provide extensive documentation of the cycads and their habitats.

These unique plants provide a model for conserving other cycads worldwide

Airborne botany is ideal! Amelia Camm of Chudleigh Station effortlessly piloted her helicopter above the eucalyptus to spot the cycads below.

Manuel's expertise with the drone allowed us to assess population sizes and locate hidden cycads. This innovative remote sensing technology augments and supports the more traditional aspects of fieldwork – but long drives and steep hikes will never be replaced.

Background: The vast plateaus of Queensland host an incredible diversity of cycads hidden among the rocks and hills.

A magnificent stand of *Cycas tuckeri* reaches skyward. These captivating plants are only known from a single location on the Cape York Peninsula.

I am grateful to the California Academy of Sciences for leading this project, to the Australian Department of Environment and Energy and the Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service for permission and guidance, Sarah Crews, Amelia Camm, and Daley Ryan for help, and to the Plant Exploration Fund (see page 10) for support.

M. Patrick Griffith, Executive Director
patrick@montgomerybotanical.org

Cycads of Tehuantepec

The narrow Mexican isthmus of Tehuantepec is home to a great diversity of cycad species. Miguel Angel Pérez Farrera of Herbario Eizi Matuda of the Universidad de Ciencias y Artes de Chiapas (UNICACH) kindly hosted MBC's Cycad Biologist Michael Calonje on a two week trip to visit herbaria in Chiapas and conduct fieldwork to study cycads in Chiapas and neighboring Oaxaca. The project focused on the *Ceratozamia robusta* complex, and included surveys of populations of *Dioon merolae*, *Zamia purpurea*, *Z. loddigesii*, and *Z. spartea*.

Michael, Miguel, and Cesar Daniel Coutiño Ovando with *Ceratozamia robusta*.

Michael and Miguel with *Dioon merolae*.

Some of these remote cycad habitats had been recently burnt, but the *Zamia* species fortunately showed signs of regeneration. Specimens collected from this work are being used in detailed morphological studies to investigate boundaries between known species. These firsthand field observations are also essential information for the conservation status of these species, in light of hazards such as increasing wildfires.

Michael Calonje, MBC Cycad Biologist
michaelc@montgomerybotanical.org

The team move along a ridge top trail in search of *Ceratozamia chimalapensis* and *Zamia spartea*. This habitat is known to be prone to wildfires, but this particular burn is the result of suspected arson. With increasing exotic grasses, such burns can be much more hazardous for the native cycads.

In Memory of Christiane Tyson

Christiane Tyson (1931-2020) peacefully passed away at her home, surrounded by family, this February. Known affectionately as "Chris," she was an enthusiastic supporter, dedicated volunteer and great friend of Montgomery Botanical Center. Known for an amazing array of plants around her homes in Switzerland and Coral Gables, and her straightforward charm, Chris was a loyal patron of horticulture and botany, and a friend to gardeners everywhere.

Ten years ago, I was honored to gather Chris' family and friends to dedicate our Chris Tyson Plant Conservation Building, a project she envisioned and funded. As a lifelong plant lover, Chris saw the need to house and support our seedbank, as well as provide a place for visiting scientists to process specimens. In the decade since, both programs grew amazingly in their new home. Chris, along with her late husband Christopher (also known as "Chris") were also steadfast believers in education, and supported our very successful Conservation Horticulture Fellowship program.

Chris was my trusted advisor, close confidant, and dear friend. Our lives and our garden flourish much more vibrantly from having known her.

M. Patrick Griffith, Executive Director
patrick@montgomerybotanical.org

Thank You to Our 2019 Volunteers

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Montgomery Botanical Center 2019 Collection Inventory

	Palms	Cycads	Other
Total Taxa	426	259	521
in ground	379	234	504
in nursery	119	86	27
Total Accessions	2,285	1,894	1,979
in ground	1,971	1,681	1,951
in nursery	360	285	32

	Palms	Cycads	Other
Total Plants	8,482	7,172	2,401
in ground	6,483	5,477	2,316
in nursery	1,999	1,695	85

16,964 Plants !

Montgomery Botanical Center
Gratefully Acknowledges Your 2019 Support

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Batchelor Foundation

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IN SUPPORT OF THE PLANT EXPLORATION FUND

The Plant Exploration Fund went from zero to nearly $250,000 thanks to the generous donors who contributed in 2019. The lead matching gift from Dr. Lin Lougheed inspired many donors to give generously, and also brought new donors to Montgomery.

> "I personally want to thank my generous friends who have contributed to the Plant Exploration Fund. Without your crucial support, Montgomery's scientists and international collaborators would not be able to carry on their vital conservation efforts. Thank you for your help."
>
> ~ Lin Lougheed.

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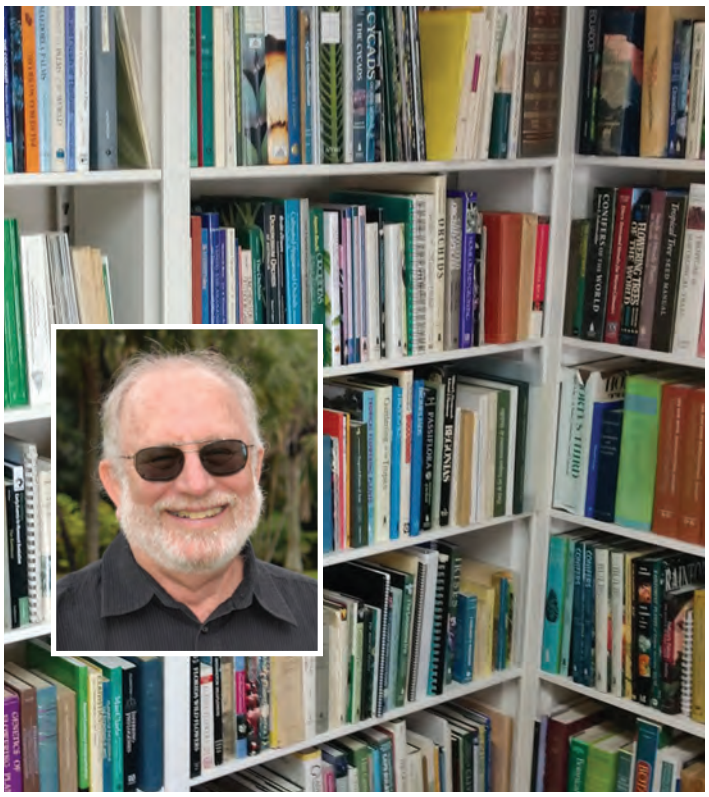
Montgomery apologizes for any omissions or errors in accuracy



The Gift of Knowledge

Dr. Alan Meerow, famed botanist, horticulturist and geneticist, retired last year. Over his long career at Chapman Field, Alan amassed a great collection of books on palms, cycads, horticulture and genetics – all prime subjects here! Alan generously donated his extensive library to Montgomery. Now housed and shelved, the Alan Meerow Botanical Library is already seeing great use.

An even greater gift from Alan was his appointment as our Kelly Botanical Research Fellow – Alan's talents are now part of our *intellectual capital*. Some call Alan the botanical heir to David Fairchild himself – they shared an office, a passion, and a legacy. Welcome to Montgomery, Alan!

Montgomery gratefully acknowledges your unrestricted contributions in 2019

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FROM THE MONTGOMERY ARCHIVE

Celebrating the Dean of American Horticulture, 1949

Colonel Montgomery gave a party in honor of Liberty Hyde Bailey's 91st birthday at the Coconut Grove Palmetum (now Montgomery Botanical Center).

A pantheon of botanical luminaries stands on the east side of Nell's House in the left image: Ethel Zoe Bailey (L. H.'s daughter), curator of the Bailey Hortorium at Cornell; Liberty Hyde Bailey, author of numerous botany and horticulture books; David Fairchild, legendary plant introducer for the USDA's Chapman Field (see also page 11); Walter Swingle, world expert on citrus, and Colonel Robert Montgomery, founder and leader of botanic gardens. At center, L. H. Bailey helps himself to some cake. The right image shows the numerous guests gathered to enjoy the event and the Colonel's palms.

Decades of correspondence in the Montgomery Archive show how Colonel Montgomery encouraged and supported Bailey's explorations for palms, a tradition continued at Montgomery Botanical Center to this day (see page 10). Bailey also travelled extensively to study the Palmettoes (*Sabal*), another connection with the modern work of Montgomery (see page 4).

Have you seen our New Website?
montgomerybotanical.org