

Remote Ronier Palms

Rising on the Equator from the Gulf of Guinea, the Island of Sao Tome gives home to a remote stand of Ronier Palm, *Borassus aethiopum*. This majestic, giant palm species is widespread in Africa, but confined to a single savanna on the northern edge of this isle. Early botanists noted its occurrence on Sao Tome, but as in many cases, specimens were simply not in museums – too hard to collect a palm with such huge leaves, held so high!

To remedy this lack of information, we formed an international team, and over the course of several days, we documented these massive plants – making the first specimens of Sao Tome’s Ronier for any herbaria, depositing these in Sao Tome and Geneva for future studies. Seeds from these giants have now germinated at Montgomery, and I look forward to the day they tower above us like their mothers, adding impressive stature to our landscape.

We note with alarm that the once-natural savanna fires are now too frequent and too intense – fast-growing exotic grasses heighten these blazes and refuel the next one too quickly. We saw venerable palms with narrow, charcoal bases, vulnerable to being toppled, and some unfortunates that were already brought low. Perhaps growing these palms in a local nursery, or preventing further fires would help to preserve the palm.

Background: Few remaining Ronier Palms stand on a hilly savanna overlooking the Atlantic.



The massive, colorful fruits of *Borassus aethiopum* contrast with the dark leaf stalks in a compelling way.

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Specimens from this work fully document this unique population.