

Montgomery Botanical NEWS

*Advancing Research, Conservation, and Education
through Scientific Plant Collections*

Spring/Summer 2012

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Giant *Zamia* Discovered!

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

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

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F r o m t h e
Executive Director

Dear Friends,

It is an exciting time at Montgomery!

SEEDS THAT WE HAVE SOWN – the great work we are doing here in Coral Gables, our fieldwork at distant sites and our collaborations around the world – are now maturing into some nice outcomes!

This year, our plant collection celebrates 80 years of growth! Colonel Robert Montgomery first brought palms and cycads together here in 1932. Here you can read examples of how we diligently expand and carry that work forward, while also honoring the past (see back cover).

Plant exploration continues to make strides here: this issue highlights new species – one palm and one cycad – that our team brought to light. On the front cover you can see the new Giant *Zamia* that Michael described – page 4 has the details. On page 5, I recount the discovery of a new palm here in the United States, and Larry shares his work to collect the Mexican Palmetto.

The most important international event in the cycad world – CYCAD 2011 – took place this past December; please see pages 6 and 7. The great team at Fairylake Botanical Garden, chaired by Dr. Li Nan, set the bar very high, bringing together excellent speakers and great events in a perfect venue. I was honored to serve on the organizing committee and to bring a delegation of MBC experts to the meeting.

The news featured here is a just a portion of the great work going on at Montgomery – we help out many people and places, as you can see on page 11. These important contributions to plant research and conservation spring from consistent hard work by our team and your continued, generous support, as shown on page 10. So, please accept my gratitude and join me in celebrating our successes.

...and on the facing page please read a short note about my recent fieldwork. It is SUCH a thrill to see great plants in the field! Please visit and I will share more photos of these incredible palms.

Pictured: Dr. Griffith on Mona Island (see facing page).

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.

*Dr. M. Patrick Griffith, Executive Director
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Eugenio, Jose and Javier with *Pseudophoenix sargentii*



Patrick measuring a specimen



The Mona Ground Iguana is found no other place

A New “Giant *Zamia*” Discovered: *Zamia tolimensis*



Hector Esquivel with *Z. tolimensis*



Michael, Hector and Deicy processing the specimens



The Collecting Team



Hector and Michael processing specimens

Two historical herbarium specimen collections were known for an intriguing arborescent species of *Zamia* occurring in Tolima, Colombia; one collected 86 years ago by Russian botanist Georg Woronow, the other collected 68 years ago by American botanist Elbert L. Little, Jr.

Based on similarities in leaflet shape, these collections were previously considered to belong to the species *Zamia poeppigiana*, but it was necessary to study these plants in the field in order to confirm if this was the case or whether these belonged to a new species altogether.

After many decades of remaining obscure, this long-lost taxon was accidentally re-discovered! It was found in the Mountains of the Central Cordillera of Southern Tolima, during a plant diversity study by a research team from Universidad del Tolima led by Hector Esquivel, director of the TOLI herbarium.

After such an amazing accidental discovery, a collaborative field expedition was organized between the Universidad del Tolima and Montgomery Botanical Center in June of 2010, in order to shed some light on this poorly known arborescent *Zamia*. Two geographically distant populations of this intriguing *Zamia* were located and studied in the field, and our results indicated that the plants from Tolima belonged to an undescribed species, which is easily distinguished from other arborescent South American species such as *Zamia poeppigiana* and *Z. lindenii*.

Described collaboratively by authors from the Universidad del Tolima, Montgomery Botanical Center, and The New York Botanical Garden, it was named *Zamia tolimensis* to honor the Department of Tolima where it was discovered. The formal description* was published in the December 2011 issue of *BRITTONIA*.

Zamia tolimensis is an unusual cycad in many respects (see front cover). With leaves over 10 feet long, leaflets close to 1.5 feet long, a trunk over 13 feet tall and massive seed cones that weigh up to 7 pounds, it is one of the largest species of *Zamia* ever known!

It is also the first species known to occur in the highlands of the Central Cordillera mountain range, and occurring at one of the highest elevations (up to 6000 feet) known for the entire genus.

Plants were locally abundant in the two populations studied, but limited to small forest fragments in a largely deforested region, so the species is considered to be Critically Endangered.

The native range of this species has remained inaccessible to botanists for decades because of the precarious security situation in the region from armed conflict – perhaps explaining how such a large, locally abundant *Zamia* could remain obscure for so many years.

Michael Calonje, Cycad Biologist
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Hector and Claudia with a giant leaf

* Calonje, M., H.E. Esquivel, D. Stevenson, C. Calonje and D. Pava. 2011. A new arborescent species of *Zamia* from the Central Cordillera of Tolima, Colombia (Cycadales, Zamiaceae), with comments on the *Z. poeppigiana* species complex. *BRITTONIA* 63: 442-451.

A New Palm Species in the United States

Many years ago, as botany students at the University of Texas, Austin, Doug Goldman and I travelled to the South Texas coast. Doug was in search of a little-known palm that had puzzled botanists – it resembled a common *Sabal minor*, but had a tall, strong trunk – up to 30 feet! Perhaps only 300 of these mysterious palms grow in a humid bottomland forest among oaks and elms. Prior collectors made only a few specimens and experts called these ‘robust dwarf palmettos.’

Doug and I prepared specimens, gathered samples, wrote extensive notes and took photographs. Doug also carefully analyzed the DNA at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew – the results suggested a new discovery!

Over the years, Doug and I each completed many other botanical

projects – on orchids, cacti, grasses and cycads – while the *Sabal* remained an enigma. Last year, Doug, now with the USDA, led a group of experts to complete the study.*

Close examination revealed that these palms were a new hybrid species – *Sabal* × *brazoriensis* – resulting from what appears to be an ancient cross between *Sabal minor* and *Sabal palmetto*. Interestingly, although *Sabal mexicana* (see below) grows much nearer than *Sabal palmetto* to the ‘Brazoria Palms,’ our analysis shows *S. mexicana* was not involved.

It is exciting that these discoveries can still be made – quoting from the paper: “such work likely will reveal a number of surprises.”

*Dr. Patrick Griffith, Executive Director
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*Goldman, D.H., M.R. Klooster, M.P. Griffith, M.F. Fay, & M.W. Chase. A preliminary evaluation of the ancestry of a putative *Sabal* hybrid (Arecaceae: Coryphoideae), and the description of a new nothospecies, *Sabal* × *brazoriensis*. PHYTOTAXA 27: 8–25.

The Last Natural Forest of *Sabal mexicana* in the U.S.

Tucked away at the very southern tip of Texas near Brownsville in one of the lowest loops of the Rio Grande is a very special 527-acre preserve containing the last natural stand of *Sabal mexicana* in the United States. That core *Sabal* forest is about 32 acres in size. The Audubon Society purchased the land and managed the property for several years, realizing the value of this natural *Sabal mexicana* palm forest.

The Sanctuary, now managed by the Gorgas Science Foundation, provides critical shelter and breeding habitat

for many endangered or high-priority birds – and is among the last vestiges of original *Sabal* palm forest in the U.S.

I obtained permission and collected a population sample of seed from the Sanctuary last October with my colleague Dr. Romeo Montalvo, of the South Texas Palm Society. Fruit production was down from previous years according to Romeo, because of two severe winters in a row and the long drought last summer, but with diligence, we managed to find five trees with mature fruit. The seed is being germinated and grown in the Montgomery greenhouse. We also made a dried specimen appropriate for future scientific studies, which was deposited at the FTBG herbarium along with duplicates to be deposited elsewhere.



Larry Noblick with *Sabal mexicana*



*Dr. Larry Noblick, Palm Biologist
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2011 第九届国际 The 9th International



South China is a center of cycad diversity and places a high priority on the study of these unique botanical treasures. Therefore, the city of Shenzhen in southeast China proved to be an ideal place to hold THE 9TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON CYCAD BIOLOGY from Dec. 1-7, 2011. The conference was

organized by Fairylake Botanical Garden, the Cycad Society of China, the IUCN/SSC Cycad Specialist Group, the New York Botanical Garden and Montgomery Botanical Center, and co-organized by the Shenzhen Urban Management Bureau, Department of National Reserves & Wildlife Conservation, the National Forestry Bureau, and the China Wild Plant Conservation Association.

Over 100 delegates from 15 different countries, including 50 cycad experts from China, participated in the conference. Talks and posters were presented in eight main study areas: Genetics and Genomics, Conservation, Taxonomy and Phylogeny, Ecology, Horticulture, Toxicology, Economic Botany, and Information Management. A total of 54 talks and 22 posters were presented for a total of 76 presentations.

The conference was held at the Shenzhen International Garden and Flower Expo Park, which is solar powered, making it a very green conference. Montgomery Botanical Center was well represented at the gathering, with MBC staff authoring or co-authoring a variety of talks and posters – from genetics to horticulture (presenters in parentheses):

- A phylogeny of *Zamia* (Michael Calonje).
- Thermogenesis of cycad cones (Irene Terry).
- *Microcycas calocoma*: conservation horticulture (Patrick Griffith).



Dr. Chad Husby with *Cycas fairylake* at Meilen Reservoir

- Conservation genetics of Caribbean *Zamia* (Alan Meerow).
- Structural evolution of cycads (Patrick Griffith).
- Phenology of *Zamia* (James Clugston).
- Conservation action plan for *Zamia lucayana* (Michael Calonje).



Special Issue of the Journal of the Fairylake Botanical Garden, Shenzhen, China.

International Conference On Cycad Biology



- Evaluating media for growth of *Zamia* species (Chad Husby).
- Botanic gardens cycad collections (Patrick Griffith).
- Genetic variation of the *Zamia pumila* complex (Alan Meerow).
- Cycad horticulture at MBC (Stella Cuestas).
- Assessing coffee grounds to control cycad scale (Tracy Magellan).
- Cycad sex ratios (Claudia Calonje).

Many of MBC's research colleagues also presented their work. A full list of presentations, including full titles, abstracts and authors can be found in the Special Issue of the Journal of Fairylake Botanical Garden, available online at the conference website.

This conference allowed cycad biologists from around the world to present new scientific discoveries and discuss future directions. Central to the conference was the IUCN Cycad Specialist Group, which met to update information on cycads on the Red List for 2011 with new data gained from recent research.

This conference was an immense success. Being able to learn about the latest cycad research being conducted around the world at one conference was spectacular. Cycad biologists all over the world are rapidly improving collective knowledge of these critically endangered plants at a time when this information is especially crucial to their conservation.



Claudia Calonje with *Macrozamia* at Shenzhen Fairylake Botanical Garden

In addition to the amazing array of research presentations, the conference participants also had the opportunity to explore cycads in nature and in cultivation in the Shenzhen area. A field trip to the forest at the Meilin Reservoir afforded an opportunity to observe the endemic *Cycas fairylakea*. In addition, participants

Over 100 Delegates from 15 Countries

enjoyed touring the impressive National Cycad Germplasm Conservation Center, a major *ex situ* conservation collection at Fairylake. Among other important projects, the Center has undertaken key work in conservation and reintroduction of the very unique Chinese endemic cycad, *Cycas debaoensis*. After the conference, Michael Calonje and Claudia Calonje visited the habitat of *Cycas debaoensis* with MBC Honorary Member William Tang.

The MBC Team would like to thank the excellent people at Fairylake Botanical Garden for expertly hosting this very important event.

Dr. Chad Husby, Collections MGR & Botanist
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Notes & Updates

- ✧ Montgomery recently contributed to a workshop on establishing a national botanic garden in Haiti. Botanic gardens in the Caribbean, US, Canada and Europe were involved. Chad Husby presented on the role of botanic gardens in preserving rare plant species and participated in field trips to proposed sites for the new garden.
- ✧ MBC began a plant and seed exchange with Singapore Botanic Gardens (SBG). In December, following the Cycad 2011 meeting, Chad went to Singapore to begin the project. Chad presented MBC's work with ancient plant forms and exchanged information with botanists and horticulturists at SBG and Gardens by the Bay. Chad collected propagation material from many new plants, including several tropical conifer species never before cultivated in North America.
- ✧ A Cycad Biology Workshop for high school teachers was recently given, as part of the Caribbean Cycad project supported by the National Science Foundation, involving Montgomery Botanical Center, the USDA Chapman Field Station, Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden, The New York Botanical Garden, and Florida International University. The teacher's workshop combined the living collections of MBC alongside discussions and laboratory demonstrations.
- ✧ A group of landscape architects and garden professionals visited Montgomery, as part of the Historic Landscapes Symposium. The Symposium, led by Ian Simpkins from Vizcaya Museum and Gardens, was organized by the American Public Gardens Association.

Sustainability for Montgomery's Irrigation Program

While the word SUSTAINABILITY has several meanings and even more implications, in the MBC Irrigation Program 'sustainable' refers to efforts to ensure an adequate and economic supply of high quality water into the future. Several issues back (Vol. 16(1)), I discussed irrigation conservation measures presently in place at Montgomery. When these measures are projected into the future, CONSERVATION becomes SUSTAINABILITY.

The greatest present threat to our water supply is saltwater intrusion. In our region of Miami-Dade County the freshwater/saltwater interface varies on a seasonal basis, but in general seems to track along 57th Ave. Test wells east of this line show unacceptable levels of salt while to the west, wells consistently show negligible salinity. If we were confident that this situation would continue into the future our concerns over sustainability would be allayed, but we cannot afford to be overconfident and need to seek alternatives should the need arise.

Technologies that hold the most promise – desalination and processed 'gray water' – involve high start-up costs and come with environmental concerns. The Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan could have a beneficial impact on our freshwater supply, but the benefits will probably not be seen until far into the future.

Our long-time irrigation consultant, Rick Frost, and his hydrologist both believe that there are adequate economically viable supplies of fresh water presently available on site. With



Facilities and Horticulture Team working on the South Wellhouse: Jack, Mario, Jesse, Ansel and Lee (on the loader).

their guidance and advice, the Horticulture and Facilities Team will be striving to develop and sustainably manage this resource into the future.

*Lee Anderson, Superintendent
leea@montgomerybotanical.org*

Thank You to Our 2011 Volunteers

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TEAM NEWS

This year MBC was awarded a generous grant from the **Elizabeth Ordway Dunn Foundation** supporting two new Conservation Horticulture Fellows. Through this grant, the Fellows will gain experience and education in botanic garden horticulture and operations – while helping MBC meet its high workload.

MBC worked with the Miami-Dade College (MDC) Horticulture Technology Program (Professor Theresa Chormanski) to recruit two early-career horticulture students for these positions.



Alberto Diaz



Xavier Gratacos



Sebastian del Valle

Alberto Diaz is known to the team as a previous MBC horticulture intern, working with the plant collection; now, Alberto is back as a Conservation Horticulture Fellow. **Xavier Gratacos** came highly recommend by the MDC Nursery, where he trained volunteers and set up labs for courses. Xavier also interned in the Everglades working on a restoration project prior to his fellowship. Our two Conservation Horticulture Fellows are off to a strong start helping manage rare plants in the MBC Nursery.

Another young horticulturist – **Sebastian del Valle** – is a student from South Miami High School who has been interning at Montgomery since last autumn. Sebastian is working with the horticulture team, learning the methods of garden arboriculture, from proper tree trimming techniques to managing pests and pathogens.



Volunteer Nora Denslow cares for the dicot and conifer collection. Would you like to volunteer? To volunteer to help at Montgomery contact Tracy. (305)667-3800 ext. 114 tracym@montgomerybotanical.org

MONTGOMERY BOTANICAL CENTER 2011 COLLECTION INVENTORY

	PALMS	CYCADS	OTHER
TOTAL TAXA	434	256	638
IN GROUND	355	238	529
IN NURSERY	156	104	197
TOTAL ACCESSIONS	2,289	1,929	2,392
IN GROUND	1,941	1,592	2,146
IN NURSERY	469	539	282
TOTAL PLANTS	12,111	10,545	3,474
IN GROUND	5,804	4,249	2,542
IN NURSERY	6,307	6,296	932

MONTGOMERY BOTANICAL CENTER

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Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh (U.K.)
Royal Botanic Gardens Kew (U.K.)
Sandra Koi
Sarah Federman
Sarah Martin
Shenzhen FairyLake Botanical Garden
(China)
Silke Roch
Singapore Botanic Gardens
South Florida Palm Society
Swarthmore College
Todd Maerowitz
TOLI Herbarium, Universidad del Tolima
Tom Cox
Tropical Arborists Guild
Tropical Flowering Tree Society
UF Tropical Research and Education
Center
University of Antioquia
University of Florida
University of Georgia
University of Miami
University of Rome (Italy)
University of South Florida
University of the West Indies (Trinidad
& Tobago)
University of Toronto (Canada)
University of Victoria (Canada)
Urban Paradise Guild
USDA – APHIS
USDA – Chapman Field
USDA PLANTS Database
Vanessa Sanchez
Vizcaya Museum and Gardens
Vlastik Rybka, Ph.D.
Wendy Zomlefer, Ph.D.
Willie Tang

Above are individuals and institutions that received MBC plant material, service, in-kind support, or worked with MBC to advance botanical science, conservation, or education.

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FROM THE
MONTGOMERY ARCHIVE



The Villagers of Coral Gables recently supported the restoration of the entrance to Nell's House – restoring the wrought iron door and the wooden door that make up the iconic entrance. Since 1932, the entrance to Nell's House has been featured in many photographs, demonstrating its classic beauty and prominence. The ironwork script above the doorknob reads "Elanar," a portmanteau of Eleanor and Robert.

In 2009, The Villagers brought over 700 visitors to tour Nell's House as part of their Historic House Tour. We appreciate The Villagers' continued support and the wonderful things they do for historic preservation.