



THE INTERNATIONAL PALM SOCIETY

July 2020

NEWSLETTER

SAVING TAHINA — YOU CAN HELP

PalmTalk (the public forum of the International Palm Society) is initiating a program to preserve *Tahina spectabilis*, an endangered palm that PalmTalk brought to the world's attention in 2007. The discovery of this enormous, new palm generated worldwide interest, but now due to its extremely limited and fragile range in Madagascar, *Tahina* needs our help.

Please visit PalmTalk (go to www.palms.org, and click on the PalmTalk Forums tab) to see how the IPS and the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew are partnering with a local village in Madagascar to help save this amazing palm. You can make a donation to the project and be a part of this unique partnership in conservation.

Please donate today!

One of the first photos posted on PalmTalk of the mysterious palm that came to be known as *Tahina spectabilis* and the little girl (at the time) for whom it was named, Anne-Tahina Metz.



Virtual hiking on Reunion Island, lowlands edition by Andy Hurwitz

This article continues the “virtual hike” and tour of Reunion’s palms that began in last month’s Newsletter. This month, we explore the palms and landscapes of the low to middle elevations.

We begin by traveling to the windward eastern coast of the island, just south of Piton-Sainte-Rose, to ramble in Anse des Cascades. This idyllic cove is situated among groves of palm trees. The park is cool and shady. Other non-palm (gasp!) sights include local islanders enjoying picnics, waterfalls (cascades) gently tumbling down basalt rock, and colorful fishing boats bringing the daily catch. It is here that we will encounter *Acanthophoenix rubra*. This species, once abundant, is no longer found in the wild. In fact, *A. rubra* at Anse des Cascades represent the oldest trees of this species on the entire Island.

Acanthophoenix rubra (palmier rouge des Bois or red palm of the woodlands) is endemic to both Reunion and Mauritius. It is found in the lowlands, at elevations below 600 m. Of all the species in this genus, *A. rubra* has the most prominent “elephant foot,” the broad, flaring base of the trunk. It is thought that the wide base may serve as an anchor, protecting the plant from cyclones on the windward coast. As “*rubra*” indicates, this is the most colorful species of the genus. The leaf sheets are armed with ferocious black spines, which diminish if not disappear once a palm reaches about a decade of growth. In fact older plants possess leaf sheaths that become “smooth as velvet” (Ludwig). Because of easy accessibility, palm seeds have been poached by unscrupulous seed collectors. It is now grown as a cash crop for heart of palm, mostly on the windward side of the island as it requires 3000 mm rain and an average temperature of 24°C (75°F).



TROIS MARES

In the south-central area of the island is Trois Mares, home to the rare *A. rousselii*.

Acanthophoenix rousselii is solely found on the Roussel family estate, in the town limits of Le Tampon. Here it grows at a transitional elevation, 600–815 m, essentially at a middle elevation between *A. rubra* (at the coast) and *A. crinita* in the mountains. Populations of *A. rousselii* have been decimated over the years by cyclones, birds and human encroachment. Interestingly, *A. rousselii* is the only member of the genus with seeds too large to be dispersed by birds.

In 2002 there were about 76 adult specimens scattered over the 500-acre estate. This number has dwindled and now the species is probably represented by about 60 mature trees all over 80 years of age.

Acanthophoenix rubra, Anse des Cascades

Virtual hiking on Reunion Island, lowlands edition



The flaring base of *A. rubra*.

The stem of *A. rousseii* is almost smooth, without the characteristic deep leaf scars seen in the other two species of *Acanthophoenix*.

Acanthophoenix rousseii on the Roussel Estate.



Virtual hiking on Reunion Island, lowlands edition

PLANTATION SAINT PHILIPPE

We are off to the rugged southern coast and plantation Saint Philippe. Here we find *A. rubra* growing from the beach up to the volcano. This region is especially known for traditional handicrafts made of *Pandanus* leaves, sugarcane, bourbon vanilla and, of course, palm cabbage.

When early French botanists voyaged to Reunion Island, palms were ubiquitous. But even by 1802 Bory de Saint Vincent was concerned about preservation. He identified the culprit of the palm's demise would be "human gluttony." The palm cabbage is a popular ingredient of creole cooking. And sadly, the dire prediction was realized; *A. rubra* is no longer found in the wild. Wisely, a local farmer established a plantation of cultivated palms at Saint Philippe in 1980. It is hoped that planned harvesting will help save the species from extinction.



The plantation of *Acanthophoenix rubra*.



Virtual hiking on Reunion Island, lowlands edition



FORÊT DE MARE LONGUE

Just beyond the plantation we will encounter the primary lowland tropical forest of Mare Longue. It is remarkable that despite two centuries of aggressive deforestation, resulting in loss of over 90% of original rainforest, this forest (considered the richest on the entire island) has survived.

The trail starts at the memorial to professor Cadet, a botanist from the University of Reunion Island, who undertook extensive studies of the endemic flora.

This loop has elevation changes of only about 100 m. We will see a very lush environment with plants growing among lava flows. Ferns and epiphytes are prominent. Here we will find *Hyphorbe Indica*.

CAP DE L'ABRI

The drive south from the beach at Grande Anse will hug the jagged coastline toward Cap de l'Abri in the southeast corner of the island. In this littoral (seashore) forest we will find *Latania lontaroides* (the red latan palm) which is endemic ONLY to Reunion Island. The hike will traverse ancient lava flows from the Piton de la Fournaise. Windward, the breeze is stiff and salt spray is near continuous. Footing can be difficult as the ground is rugged and rocky with a thick mat of fallen leaves. About 200 individuals of *L. lontaroides* grow in this locale.

Latania lontaroides Is the largest tree of the genus. It is noted for the reddish color of the leaf stalks and margins which make it very attractive. Palmate leaves are stiff and waxy. The base initially bulges, then tapers with a smooth trunk eventually reaching circumferential leaf scars.

Virtual hiking on Reunion Island, lowlands edition

The red latan fruit (pommes latanier) is considered a delicacy; fortunately, the cabbage is bitter and therefore not harvested for human consumption. However, the trees were decimated by early settlers, who used the palm for cheap timber and roofing.



Virtual hiking on Reunion Island, lowlands edition

The author gratefully acknowledges Olivier Reilhes, without whom these “hikes” would certainly not be possible. Olivier kindly permitted his magnificent botanical photography to be used for this edition of the newsletter. All photos are his.

Additionally, Olivier is the editor of Latania, the journal of the Palmyrae-Union. The journal (right) can be found here: <http://www.palmyrae-union.com/latania.php>



Next month: Mauritius & Round Island

In next month’s Newsletter, we shall continue our virtual exploration of the Mascarene archipelago with a post-Biennial visit to Mauritius and neighboring Round Island.

Hiking in Black Gorges National Park, Mauritius (photo courtesy of Gabby Salazar).



DOES YOUR LOCAL CHAPTER/PALM SOCIETY HAVE AN EVENT? Let us know by advertising it here! Or share your experiences afterwards! Contact us and send us pictures!

Keep in mind that the IPS also offers merchandise online that can help you show off your membership, present your palm passion, and help spread the word about our community of palm enthusiasts!!

How do you get your own IPS items that include jewelry, shirts, caps, mugs, glasses, and many other practical items? Simply follow the “caps, t-shirt, totes, and more!” link from the IPS homepage [IPS Home](#), or go directly to this link: [IPS CafePress](#).



Remember to support our organization by participating with us! You can contribute by participating in our Palm Talk forum, our Facebook group, or by writing an article for either Palms journal or a note for IPS newsletter. You can also make an extra donation to the International Palm Society.



www.palms.org



@InternationalPalmSociety



@IPS_PalmSociety



@thepalmsociety