



# THE INTERNATIONAL PALM SOCIETY

May 24, 2023

NEWSLETTER

## Special Edition

Dateline: London, England

### John Dransfield is named a Dent Smith Memorial Awardee!

The International Palm Society is thrilled to announce that for the first time since 2014 our highest accolade, The Dent Smith Memorial Award, has been bestowed upon Dr. John Dransfield.



Dr. John Dransfield holding the Dent Smith Memorial Award, photo by Andy Hurwitz. The award was designed by artist Raymond New, of Wabash Indiana. It is fabricated with reclaimed wenge (*Millettia laurentii*, an African hardwood), vintage copper and features a photograph of *Tahina spectabilis* taken by Dr. Dransfield in Madagascar.

# Special Edition – London

## Background

The Dent Smith Award was officially approved by the IPS Board of Directors on June 18, 1999, to: “formally commemorate and distinguish the outstanding service given to our organization by its founder, Dent Smith. The Dent Smith Memorial Award, our highest honor, is to be given to individuals in recognition of outstanding contributions to palms either in scientific, horticultural, or promotional areas” (Palms Supplement 1999).

The Dent Smith Award joins an already crowded trophy case in John and Jatmi’s home, which includes the prestigious Linnean Medal (2004) from The Linnean Society and the David Fairchild Medal (1999), please see photo and story below:

*Palms*, 43(3), 1999, p. 121

## Editor Receives Award

One of our co-editors, Dr. John Dransfield, received the prestigious David Fairchild Medal for Plant Exploration from the National Tropical Botanical Garden on 19 February 1999. Citing Dr. Dransfield’s contributions to *Genera Palmarum* and *Palms of Madagascar* and his numerous publications on rattans, Dr. Paul Alan Cox, Director of the National Tropical Botanical Garden, awarded Dr. Dransfield a bronze plaque and citation. The citation commended Dr. Dransfield “as being expert in the art and skill of botanical exploration, employing ingenious conveyances and curious itineraries to traverse areas both remote and inaccessible throughout the world, bringing to the notice of polite and learned company plants of singular beauty and economic importance ...” To that, we can add only, “Congratulations, John!”

SCOTT ZONA



Douglas McBryde Kinney (left), Chairman of the National Tropical Botanical Garden, with John Dransfield (center) and Paul Alan Cox (right).

### Dent Smith Memorial Awardees

1999: Natalie Uhl

2014: Jim Cain (posthumous)

2014: Libby Besse

2023: John Dransfield

## Special Edition – London

Drs. Natalie Uhl and Dr. John Dransfield at a launch party announcing the second edition of *Genera Palmarum*, L.H. Bailey Hortorium, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, in 2008. Photo by Dr. Soejatmi Dransfield.



Dr. John Dransfield at Guatopo National Park, Venezuela during the 1994 IPS Biennial. Please note *Asterogyne spicata* towering overhead. Photo by Sven Nehlin.

## Special Edition – John Dransfield, a Brief Biography

John Dransfield matriculated at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge (founded in 1348, and the alma mater of 15 Nobel Prize laureates). He earned a B.A. in biology (1967), an M.A. in botany (1970), and completed his PhD under Professor E.J.H. Corner (1970) with studies of two Malaysian palm genera, *Eugeissona* and *Johannesteijsmannia*.

Dr. Dransfield then spent four years at the Herbarium Bogoriense and Kebun Raya, in Bogor, Indonesia. Working on a British government aid project, he specialized on the rattans, the climbing palms that are the source material for cane furniture. During a return trip to Indonesia in 1977, he married Dr. Soejatmi (Jatmi) Soenarko, a plant taxonomist and expert in bamboo—as well an honorary research fellow at RBG Kew.

By 1975, Dr. Dransfield returned to the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew where he served as head of Palm Research until retiring in 2005. During those incredibly productive years he authored or co-authored a wealth of scientific articles and books. These include landmark works such as two editions of *Genera Palmarum* (with Dr. Natalie Uhl), *The Palms of Madagascar*, and the soon to be released *Palms of New Guinea* (spearheaded Dr. William Baker).

Retirement has not slowed him in the least. Currently, as an Honorary Research Fellow at Kew, Dr. Dransfield consults on rattans for FAO (British Overseas Development Agency and the Commonwealth Development Corporation). And happily for us, he continues to serve as co-editor of the International Palm Society journal, *Palms*. In his words: “Much of my work since retirement has been devoted to the palms of Madagascar, palms of New Guinea and palm generic delimitation.”

### MARRIAGE TO DR. SOEJATMI SOENARKO

The Royal Botanical Garden Kew celebrated Dr. Dransfield’s marriage to Dr. Soejatmi (Jatmi) Soenarko, and accurately predicted a “long and happy future together” here in this article from 1977:

JOHN DRANSFIELD (herbarium) left on 14 March 1977, for nearly a year's work in S.E. Asia under the O.D.M. (Colombo Plan). For most of the year he was stationed at the Forest Research Institute in W. Malaysia, working on the taxonomy and utilisation of rattans but during October he was a representative of Kew on the R.G.S. Gunung Mulu expedition in Sarawak. In September in Malaysia, John was married to Dr. Soejatmi Soenarko who was a member of the herbarium staff, Bogor, Indonesia, and who worked on grasses for a Ph.D. at Reading University, a few years ago. Early in the morning on their wedding day, Martin Sands conveyed greetings from their friends at Kew by telephone. Afterwards, they spent a holiday in the Cameron highlands of Malaysia before John left to join the Gunung Mulu Expedition.

The Guild wishes them a long and happy future together.

*from* The journal of the Kew Guild. 10: 607–608. 1977.

## Special Edition – John Dransfield & the IPS

### EARLY YEARS

John (before the Dr.) joined the Palm Society, as it was then, in 1969 while a research student at Cambridge. However his first “brush” with the Society occurred in 1968 when a group of “Palm Society nuts” (Editor’s Note: I love that appellation!) from Florida met with him on a voyage to Kuala Lumpur, where they had traveled to see *Maxburretia* and *Johannesteijsmannia* in habitat. This “fun-loving” group included UA Young and his wife Ben, Teddie and Ted Buhler, and Ruth Schatz. At that time John was based in West Malaysia, conducting fieldwork for his PhD on *Eugeissona* and *Johannesteijsmannia*.

In 1969, John officially joined The Palm Society (not yet International), and immediately “splurged some scholarship money to buy a complete set of Principes, a purchase I have never regretted.”

After completing his doctorate, Dr. Dransfield embarked on a four-year scientific mission to the National Biological Institute of Indonesia. During this time, his connections to The Palm Society began to deepen. He explains, “Indonesia could feel pretty remote, but during the four years I spent in Indonesia, Hal Moore was a constant correspondent who did much to keep my spirits up. Hal was the pre-eminent palm biologist, based at the LH Bailey Hortorium in Cornell University in New York State. He was also the editor of Principes and a close friend of our founder Dent Smith.” Additionally, Dr. Dransfield was visited by Mel and Phyllis Sneed. This Sneeds were peripatetic palm lovers, authors of numerous articles in Principes, seed collectors and they established the IPS endowment fund.

### SEED COLLECTING FOR THE IPS

Back then, Dr. Dransfield exported palm seed to the Palm Society Seed Bank, which was administered by Lucita Wait and De Armand Hull. From Principes (22: 145–146): “Malaysia and Borneo...We have been most fortunate in having Dr. John Dransfield, of Kew Gardens in England, who is working on the Flora of Malaysia, as a most competent and enthusiastic seed collector. Our funds were, in part, helpful in making it possible for him to go to remote areas of Sumatra, Java, and Borneo, from where he sent us some very unusual species of *Pinanga*, *Areca*, etc., over the past years.”

### BIENNIALS

Dr. Dransfield has attended a notable 17 IPS Biennials. His first was the memorable 1982 Tampa, Miami and Key West, Florida Biennial (“many great and some hilarious memories”). Like many of us, work exigencies forced him to miss an occasional biennial, viz. Hawaii in 2004 and Brazil in 2010 (mostly due to the demands of publishing the second edition of *Generum Palmarum*) and Hawaii in 2022 (Covid). Like many of us, Dr. Dransfield has very fond memories of biennials past, as this comment alludes: “I still think back to the 1982 Biennial and chuckle about some of the things that we got up to! They were heady days.”

## Special Edition – John Dransfield & the IPS

AS EDITOR OF PRINCIPES/PALMS

Since 1980 (forty-three remarkable years!) Dr. John Dransfield has served as associate editor or senior editor of our peer reviewed journal Palms (formerly Principes). Here he recounts the events leading to his position: “In 1980 Hal Moore died. He had served the Society as Editor since the very beginning and his unexpected loss was felt acutely. Before he died, he had arranged that his co-worker, Dr. Natalie W. Uhl at Cornell and I should serve as associate editors, so in the months after Hal died, Natalie and I buckled down to prepare the next few parts for printing and to develop a modus operandi for co-editing the journal. Natalie retired from the co-editorship in 1999, and Scott Zona joined me to edit the journal ever since. We have tried to follow Hal Moore’s original concept for the journal to provide a window on the palm world.”



Portrait of John Dransfield, PhD by John Miller.

## Special Edition – John Dransfield & the IPS

DR. DRANSFIELD FONDLY REMINISCES UPON 54 YEARS OF MEMBERSHIP WITH THE IPS:

“I have been greatly impressed by the generosity of the society in helping to fund floristic and conservation research on palms. I have also been delighted by the friendship of many IPS members, their tolerance of palm boffins such as me and their often sheer craziness about palms. Looking back over the last 50 years, I am astonished by how much more we now know about this family of amazing plants and what a significant role the IPS has played in the accumulation of knowledge through continuing to publish the journal, for supporting palm research, particularly by young researchers and in targeted palm conservation. One of our great strengths as a society is the fact that we are a group of all sorts of different individuals, with different expertise, and with different outlooks, but all united in a passion for palms. I believe we can all be immensely proud of what has been achieved but there is still so much more to do.”

Editor’s Note: It has been an honor for me to correspond with John about our beloved Society. And I am always touched by his warm sign-off: “Happy days!” Well, these have been happy days indeed. On behalf of the entire Board of Directors of the International Palm Society, I wish to congratulate John on becoming the fourth Dent Smith Memorial Awardee!

Dr. Dransfield’s first appearance as lead author in *Principes*, 1969.

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DRANSFIELD AND WHITMORE: PALM HUNTING

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### Palm Hunting in Malaya’s National Park

J. DRANSFIELD<sup>1</sup> AND T. C. WHITMORE<sup>2</sup>

To a palm hunter, Gunong Tahan is a mountain of great interest because of its two endemic palms, *Livistona tahanensis* and *Eugeissona brachystachys*, both described by H. N. Ridley after the classic ascent by himself and the zoologists Boden Kloss and Robinson in 1906. The mountain, 7,186 feet, is the highest in Malaya, a large rolling plateau surrounded by gleaming quartzite cliffs, and deeply incised to the south by the spectacular, deep Teku Gorge. Tahan is one of the most remote mountains in Malaya and is situated in the middle of Taman Negara, Malaya’s National Park—a large area of more or less untouched forested country in the States of Pahang, Kelantan and Trengganu, with a rich fauna.

In February, 1968, we made an expedition to Gunong Tahan in order to collect *Livistona tahanensis* and *Eugeissona brachystachys* and other palms, and to study anew the so-called Tahan Woods at the foot of the mountain which are an important locality to Malayan botany. On February 15th we left the Forest Research Institute, Kepong, near Kuala Lumpur, with four aborigine tree climbers—Gerus, Gesak, Gi and Paling—and drove over the Main Range of Malaya into Pahang to Jerantut where we met Mohammed Shah of the Singapore Botanic Gardens, and then on to Kuala Tembeling, a village at the confluence of the great Pahang River and the Tembeling River. Here we were met by two park game rangers with a Malay

river boat driven by a powerful out-board motor. We were soon speeding up the Sungei Tembeling in a boat very heavily laden with food (Christmas puddings, steak puddings and tins and tins of curried chicken we soon came to dread) plant collecting gear and nine men—but not for long: one hundred yards upstream we ran aground and had to disembark to push the boat off a sandbank. No rain had fallen for two months and the rivers were all exceptionally low. We pushed off, and three hours later reached the Park headquarters at Kampong Kuala Tahan, where we stayed in a very comfortable rest-house for two nights while arranging for eight porters to carry food supplies and equipment the walk of three full days to Kuala Teku at the foot of Gunong Tahan, centre of the Tahan Woods and type locality of *Eugeissona brachystachys*.

We finally left the kampong early in the morning accompanied by one guide, two young apprentice rangers, eight porters, four tree climbers and Md. Shah, and were soon out of the scrub surrounding the village and into good forest, following up the Sungei Tahan. Palms in evidence included the very common wild sugar palm, *Arenga Westerhoutii*, *Calamus castaneus*, and the attractive *Arenga* sp. (*Didymosperma Hookerianum*), a small dark green palm-let not growing more than two feet tall, with pretty toothed leaflets and erect flower spikes. We made camp that evening at Sungei Melantai, a small river in a deep valley. Here *Oncosperma horridum* was abundant as clusters of small individuals on the hill slopes. The cab-

<sup>1</sup> The Botany School, Cambridge University, Cambridge, England.

<sup>2</sup> Forest Research Institute, Kepong, Selangor, Malaya.

## Special Edition – John Dransfield Eponymy

### List of species named after Dr. Dransfield (compiled by Dr. Scott Zona)

#### Palms:

*Dransfieldia micrantha* (Becc.) W.J.Baker & Zona

*Adonidia dransfieldii* K.M.Wong, Sugau & Y.W.Low

*Areca dransfieldii* Heatubun

*Calamus johndransfieldii* W.J.Baker

*Eremospatha dransfieldii* Sunderl.

*Heterospathe dransfieldii* Fernando

*Hydriastele dransfieldii* (Hambali, Maturb., Wanggai & W.J.Baker) W.J.Baker & Loo

*Licuala dransfieldii* Kiew, a synonym of *L. ridleyana*.

*Ravenea dransfieldii* Beentje

*Plectocomia dransfieldiana* Madulid

*Salacca dransfieldiana* Mogeia

*Vonitra dransfieldii* (Beentje) Eiserhardt & W.J.Baker (the former *Dypsis*)

*Licuala ahlidurii* Saw. "Ahliduri" means "spine merchant" and refers to John's expertise in spiny *Calamus*.

#### Orchid:

*Bulbophyllum dransfieldii* J.J.Verm.

#### Morning-glory:

*Ipomoea dransfieldii* J.R.I.Wood & Scotland, now considered illegitimate





## Special Edition – Photo Gallery (all by S. Zona)



Dr. Dransfield in Sarawak with *Salacca dransfieldiana* for the 2016 IPS Biennial.



Drs. John and Jatmi Dransfield in Singapore for the 2016 IPS Biennial.

## Special Edition – London



Dr. Dransfield with *Dransfieldia micrantha*, 2005.

Drs. John Dransfield and Joro Rakotoarinivo in Madagascar, 2005. Jimmy Razafitsalama (in the white hat) looks on.



## Parting Shot

Just last month, Drs. Soejatmi and John Dransfield visited Green Swamp, a preserve in southeastern North Carolina, USA, to see various carnivorous plants. John was especially taken by the blue-flowered butterworts (*Pinguicula caerulea*). Both Jatmi and John have an infectious enthusiasm for plants. Photo by Scott Zona.

