

The Palm Society Trip to Colombia

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When I started over a year ago to work on organizing a trip to the South American country of Colombia, I never dreamed of the difficulties and exciting times we would have. On Wednesday afternoon, June 26, 1974 our group of 27 Palm Society members departed from Miami International Airport for Cali, Colombia. (Two additional members from Costa Rica were to join us in Cali swelling the number in our group to 29.) Our departure from Miami on Avianca Airlines perhaps set a pattern of our transportation problems we would encounter on the trip. Our flight was overbooked by 40 people and after much delay and frustration, we squeezed aboard several different flights. With some little luck, and Avianca's cooperation in holding over one of the planes in Bogotá for transfer, we did all arrive in Cali as a group.

Dr. Victor Patiño of the Jardín Botánico in Cali met us at the airport. Dr. Patiño had set up our ground transportation through Viajes Oganessoff, a well known tourist company with headquarters in the Cali Inter-Continental Hotel. I was to later spend many hours in the Oganessoff office to change and remap our trip.

It was pleasant to arrive in Cali, a modern comfortable city located in the Cauca Valley, the richest agricultural valley in Colombia. But as we started through customs, an official of Avianca placed in my hands a telegram from Miami informing me all our luggage was still in Miami. It had never been placed on the plane(s) due to the confusion of our departure. This was a serious problem as we were scheduled to start first

thing the next morning for Buenaventura by charter bus. Buenaventura is one of the richest palm collecting areas located on the Pacific lowlands. Obviously we couldn't leave Cali and hope our luggage would somehow catch up with us not to mention completing customs inspection. So with Dr. Patiño's help I arranged for a one day trip to the mountains east of the Cauca Valley to find a species of *Ceroxylon* located near the remote village of Tenerife. So the next morning, dressed in our Sunday finest, we left for Tenerife and the chance to see and collect one of the famous wax palms of the Andes. As we passed through the Cauca Valley, we stopped at a Catholic monastery where we found under cultivation a tall and beautiful pinnate palm, *Syagrus sancona*. We were able to collect large quantities of fruit from this majestic palm. Then proceeding on, we slowly climbed up into the mountains and by noon started seeing small patches of the wax palms on distant mountains. The white waxy trunks stood out like thin columns of silver. We passed a few trees near the road that held promise of possible collecting. We continued on with intentions of returning to this spot if more abundant collecting could not be found ahead. By early afternoon we stopped in Tenerife, a tiny village at about 7,500 ft. elevation. The local people were growing onions and other cold climate food crops on mountain sides. One could see occasional wax palms left standing here and there and a few remote patches of native growth in the distant deep valleys of the mountains. One could only envision the thousands of wax palms once standing in the area. After a



1. A fine old allée of *Scheelea butyracea* located on a farm in the Cauca Valley near Cali, Colombia. Dr. Victor Patiño in foreground.

pause for lunch, consisting of box lunches brought from the Cali Inter-Continental Hotel, we turned the bus around fearing the rugged dirt road would become too narrow ahead. We then drove back to the roadside stand of wax palms.

There were three tall specimens growing in a field of onions. After obtaining permission from the owner of the property, a selected group went down to the trees. We were excited to find thousands of ripe seeds just fallen on the ground from huge fruit clusters high above in one of the trees. The color of the fruit was a vivid orange. We had hired a local man to climb the tree with nothing more than a rope sling and foot braces, but it was not necessary to have him

climb. (Dr. Mardy Darian from Vista, Calif. had come with a set of professional belt and spurs, but his equipment had not arrived due to the luggage delay.)

After collecting a large quantity of fruit for the members of the group, and also the Palm Society Seed Bank, we started down the mountain for Cali. We were nearing Cali when the bus motor gave a series of coughs and finally stopped. In Colombia, as elsewhere in Latin America, vehicle repairs are generally made on the spot by the driver and his helper. In this case the problem was a broken gasket on the fuel pump. Tape and string would just not stop the leaking gas. After three walking trips "down the road" by the helper to obtain more



2. *Syagrus sancona* as seen at a Catholic monastery in the Cauca Valley of Colombia. Palms in the lower row are *Chrysalidocarpus lutescens* in lush growth.

gas, the problem was not being solved. It would be impossible to just find a phone, call Ogenesoff, and arrange for another bus to be dispatched in short order for our rescue. Adding to the problem was the disappearing sun and the encroachment of darkness. About this time, Dr. Bob Courtney from Tampa, Florida whipped out his surgical bag, paid a young boy watching our plight a few pesos to find an old inner tube, and soon had carefully cut out the exact shape of a new gasket. We were back in business. I do believe this homemade gasket stayed with us the remainder of the trip. After going to the airport to claim our luggage that night, we were relieved and excited about going to Buenaventura the next morning. How-

ever, our program would have to be adjusted because of our "lost" day.

As we chugged up the other side of the Cauca Valley the next morning, stopping several times to add water to the overheated engine, we made our first stop of the day at kilometer 18 where a small undisturbed patch of forest jungle was found. Everyone scattered, collecting orchids, bromeliads and various aroids. The palms found were several species of *Chamaedorea*, a *Euterpe* with red adventitious roots and an *Aiphanes* sp. One species of *Chamaedorea* yielded a few seed.

Dr. Patiño had arranged for lunch at the Calima Agricultural Station, a field station near Buenaventura. However the slowness of the bus plus the difficulty of



3. A majestic species of *Ceroxylon*, one of the famous wax palms of the Andes, remains in a few pockets of native growth near the village of Tenerife, Colombia, at an altitude of about 7500 feet.

keeping so large a group as 29 avid collectors moving along, caused us to arrive upriver from the station hours late. Dr. Rufino Valela, director of the station, had a powered dugout waiting for us and in three trips took us across the swiftly moving Calima River. The landings had been washed away sometime in the past and it was necessary to scramble down steep, smooth, slippery rocks to reach the boat.

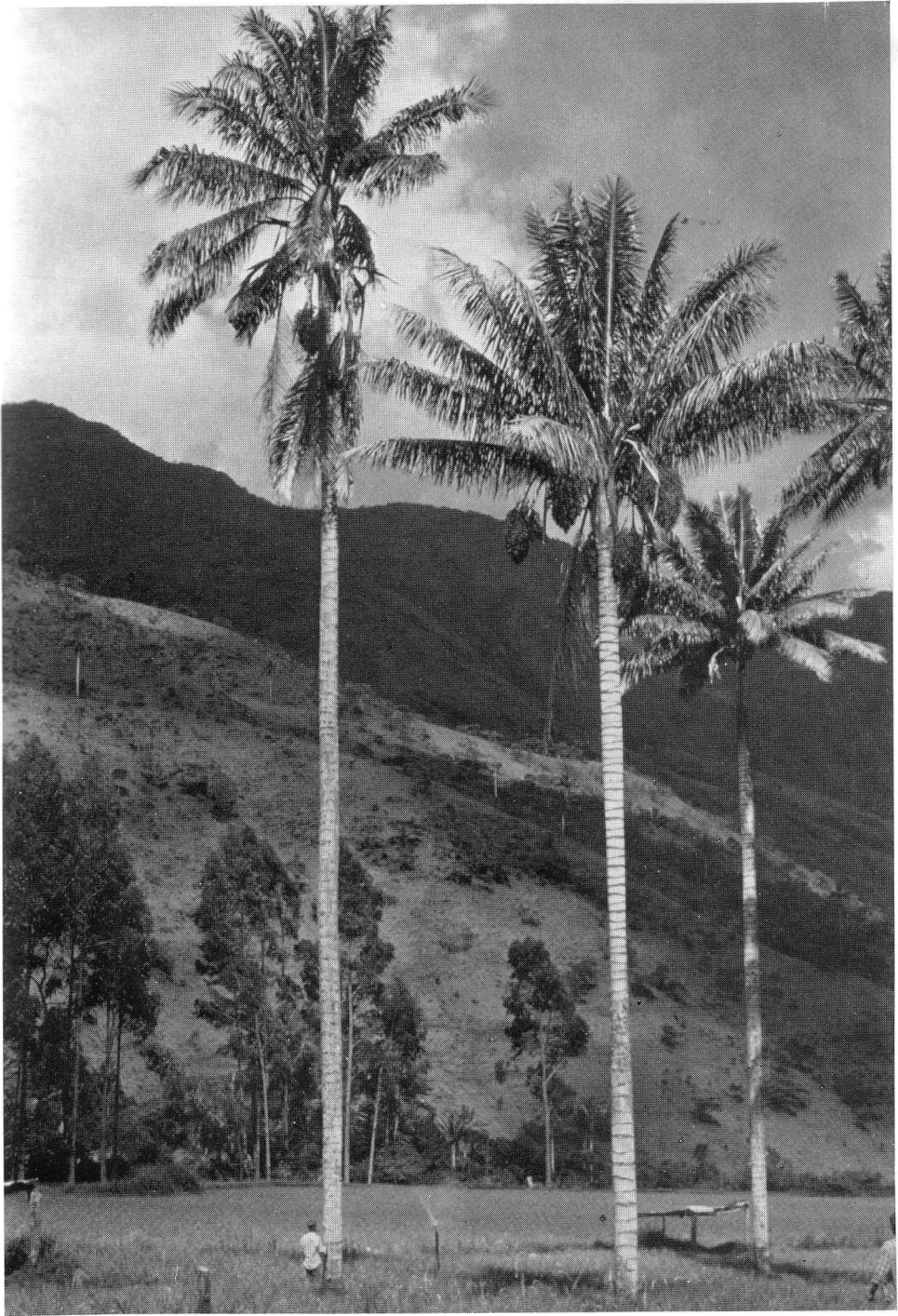
On the other side, Dr. Patiño took us a short distance into the jungle to an experimental stand of peach palms, *Bactris gasipaes*. It was a thrill to see row after row of these clustering, very spiny palms with their bright orange fruit.

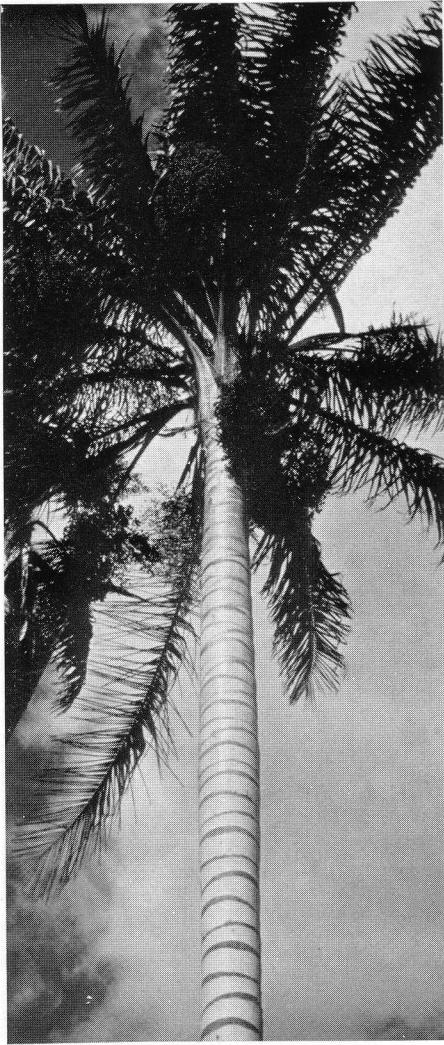
The soft fleshy coats of the seeds are eaten by the local people and add substantially to their diet. The flavor resembles a peach, hence the name. Almost every house we saw in jungle areas would have a stand of peach palms in its yard.

Next, the plan was to walk through the jungle for about two miles, ending up at the river near the experimental station. A boat would be waiting to take us across and then a short walk would take us to the station for a belated lunch. By now the rains had come. The Buenaventura area receives almost constant rain, but this afternoon it came down in torrents. Boots were required to traverse

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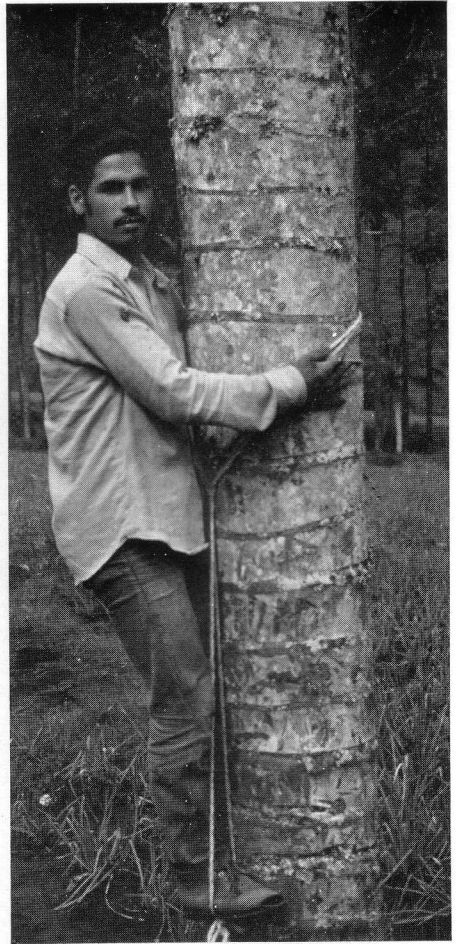
4. A stand of *Ceroxylon* growing in a field of cultivated onions beside the road near the mountain village of Tenerife, Colombia. The palm to the left is about 100 feet tall and has huge clusters of ripe fruit hanging from the crown. There were quantities of fruit on the ground which have been distributed by The Palm Society Seed Bank.





5. A close view shows the prominent waxy surface of the trunk of *Ceroxylon* at Tenerife.

the wet, muddy path and one would frequently find oneself sinking knee-deep into the soggy mud. Still, spirits ran high as we started seeing a magnificent jungle. *Jessenia polycarpa* was the dominant palm with many very attractive trunkless species, *Attalea allenii*, *Orbignya cuatrecasana* and *Ammandra decasperma*, also in abundance. Almost at



6. A young man from Tenerife demonstrates the local method of climbing a wax palm with only a rope. It was not necessary to have him climb as there were thousands of ripe fruit newly fallen on the ground.

once I realized how difficult it was going to be to keep the group even remotely together as we proceeded along the sometimes hazardous path. With a local cutter and Dr. Patiño in the lead, information as to what was being seen was sent back along the trail as best as possible. I just wonder in what condition the information was arriving at the end of the line after 29 repeats!



7 An experimental stand of the peach palm, *Bactris gasipaes*, located at Baja Calima on the property of the Calima Agricultural Station. The fruits serve as a popular item in the diet.

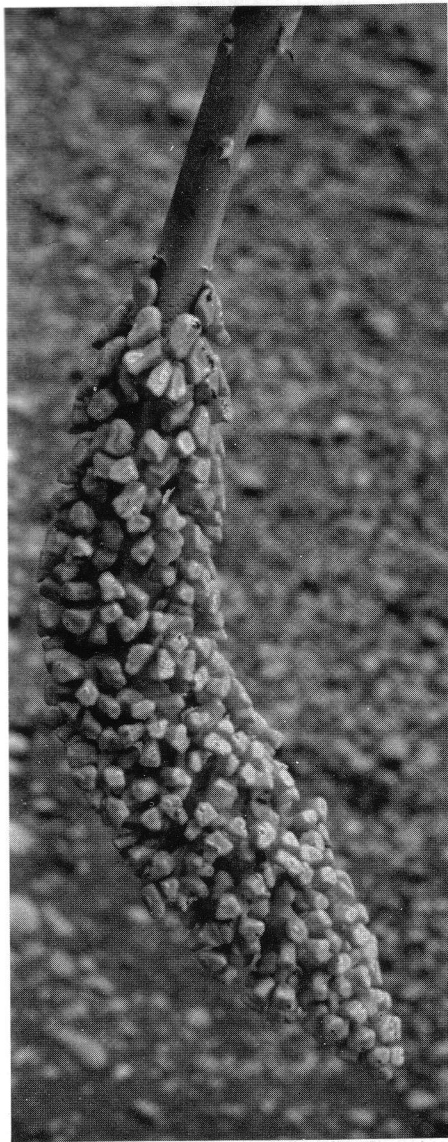
Soon the path got more rugged with many roots and obstacles to step over, small streams to wade through, and as we moved along the group seemed to cluster into three smaller groups. I was at the end of the first group running back and forth to make sure the second group would keep up. The path now narrowed down to almost no path at all and without piling logs and other material on branch paths it would be impossible for the groups behind to know which path to follow. After about four hours of sloshing along my real concern was to make sure none were lost. Adding to our problems was the possibility it would soon be dark. Despite assurances that the river was "just ahead" time was running out. We were ex-

hausted and soaked. There was no longer any verbal contact with the others behind. I myself almost became lost as I went back, couldn't find the others, and was able to join the front group after barely being able to make voice contact with them.

Just as total darkness fell, we reached the river. There was no boat awaiting us. After shouting in vain for those behind for the next half hour it was decided that the cutter would swim across the river, proceed to the station and bring help. Since we had no idea we would be in the jungle after dark we did not have any light. In total darkness, and in soggy condition, we waited until the faint sound of a motor could be heard on the river. When the boat ar-



8. Dr. U. A. Young, newly elected president of The Palm Society, observes the curious trunkless palm, *Ammandra decasperma*, on the road from Buenaventura to Baja Calima. Of special interest are the oddly shaped inflorescence of a male plant and the completely round petioles.



9. A closeup shows the strange stalked male flowers with tiny stamens scattered like grains of sand which suggested the generic name *Amandra* (see *Principes* 7: 70. 1963).

rived it was discovered that when we did not show up at the appointed time and after a two hour wait for us, the boatman had returned to the village, thinking our plans to reach the station had

been altered and a boat was no longer needed. We fully expected to go by boat to the station, but the boatman said it was much too dangerous to try to move on the swift-moving river after dark. There were floating tree stumps and other hazards that would surely upset the boat. So we were only ferried across the river to make our way to the station on foot as best we could. "Only twenty minutes" became our standing joke on the trip to the station. In reality it was another two hours to cover the "twenty minutes." In total darkness it was very hazardous as we crept along. We stumbled along as best we could sometimes crossing streams knee deep and using up every bit of our remaining energy. All the while I was envisioning the remainder of our group lost somewhere in the thick, darkened jungle.

At last the generator-created lights of the station were seen through the jungle ahead. As we stumbled into the main room, I was amazed to see the rest of our party already in camp. What had happened, according to Dr. U. A. Young, was that the second group, after realizing they were lost behind the first group, accidentally took a wrong path that led them down to the river, but further back. As it was still light, they were able to flag down a passing boat and were taken to the station. As to the third, and smallest group, when they realized they were separated and probably lost, they, by chance, came upon a woodcutter whom they prevailed upon to paddle them to the station two at a time in the woodcutters tiny dugout. So we had all arrived safe to enjoy our "lunch" at 10:00 p.m. It was amazing that no one was injured as the members of the first group thrashed and groped their way from the river to the station.

Even though we had reservations at the Hotel Comfort in Buenaventura, we



10. Arrow points to the airport at Pasto, Colombia, whittled out of the knife edge of an Andean mountain. A complete change of plans for the second half of the trip was required because the main group of Palm Society members was unable to reach the airport after two days of trying.

Photo by Don Hodel.

were obliged to make the best of the sleeping arrangements at the station. My sincere thanks to Dr. Valela for his help in offering us all he had at his disposal. After awaking at 5:00 a.m. to put on still soaked clothes, we proceeded down to the river at dawn to be moved by boat to the village and the waiting bus. We then were transported into Buenaventura.

After cleaning up and breakfast, we set off to locate the very interesting cycad, *Zamia chigua*. A fishing boat had been hired for our trip. Because of the rapid drop in the tide, we were not able to boat to the mouth of the Anchicayá River. Sand bars would have stranded the boat. Undaunted, we picked up a

local man in a dugout who was able to show us another location for the *Zamia chigua*. Seeds and trunks were collected.

That night back in Buenaventura, Dr. Patiño had arranged for us a delightful dinner at a good restaurant. Local folkloric dancers were engaged for our entertainment. Following supper the plan was to drive up to Lake Calima and stay the night at the Palermo Hotel. It was 8:00 p.m. by the time we left Buenaventura. One and a half hours was the expected time to reach Lake Calima. With the extra weight of the trips collections the bus struggled up the mountains once again. It was after 11:00 p.m. when we reached the lake. After much circling around the lake for several hours in

search of the hotel we were escorted to the hotel by a military jeep who was patrolling the lake because of a hydraulic dam at the end of the lake. After awakening the manager we finally got to bed at about 2:00 a.m. The next morning as the sun shone brightly we were able to appreciate the beauty of the setting. We spent the rest of the morning cleaning our seed and plants at the edge of the lake. This was much to the amusement of the other guests and hotel personnel. A trip back to Cali and the beautiful Hotel Inter-Continental completed our day.

At 7:00 a.m. the next morning we departed for the airport to fly at 9:45 a.m. to Pasto to start the second half of our exciting Colombian trip. A fond goodbye was given Dr. Patiño who had come to the hotel to see us off. At the airport we deposited our luggage with Avianca (the weight having about doubled due to extensive plant collecting). At 9:45 the plane for Pasto had not yet arrived. In about another hour a four engine prop plane landed with one engine out of commission. This was our plane. After a delay Avianca announced cancellation of the flight. There was no other way to get to Pasto this day. A bus ride would take 18 hours over mountain roads so treacherous that drivers will not drive after dark. After much confusion with Avianca, they agreed to put us up at the Cali Inter-Continental Hotel with all expenses paid. Again the next morning found us waiting for the plane to Pasto. It did arrive about on time and we climbed aboard. With the engine repaired, we were off for the one-hour flight to the mountain city of Pasto. As we started to descend the plane suddenly turned and headed back to Cali. The jumbled announcement over the planes speaker said the airport at Pasto had just closed down due to bad weather.

In this case, the bad weather consisted of cross winds that prevent a plane from landing.

As we flew back to Cali, I realized the second half of our trip would have to be cancelled as there was no longer time to complete our program. Again Avianca put us up at the Cali-Inter-Continental Hotel. It had now cost Avianca about \$1,200.00 for their inability to land us at Pasto. A very rapid decision was in order for us to continue our Colombian collecting trip. It would be almost impossible to arrange to visit a fresh area containing palms in abundance, transportation, lodging, food, etc. for 29 eager Palm Society members on such short notice. I called together a small committee from our group to discuss the best way to proceed. We decided to return to the Buenaventura area to do additional collecting, as we were not able to complete our program there the first time around.

I did give permission to Mardy Darian and three others of his choice to try again the next day to fly to Pasto where *Parajubaea cocoides* was known to be growing plus possible other high-elevation cold-hardy palms. And I will say here that they did successfully make the trip and had just enough time to locate and collect *Ceroxylon hexandrum*, *Geonoma* sp., *Euterpe* sp., and the attractive *Parajubaea cocoides*. It was found that the road had been washed away leading down the eastern side of the Andean Cordillera to the lower Putumayo. So even if the entire group had been able to spend the scheduled time in Pasto, we could not have reached Puerto Asis in the inland jungle area as had been originally scheduled. In addition to the trip to Pasto by Dr. Darian and his group, Norman Bezona from Hawaii and Michael Evans from California flew to Leticia on the Amazon River where Colombia, Brazil and Peru come together.

They collected seed of *Bactris*, *Euterpe*, *Mauritia*, and *Oenocarpus*. All in these two parties joined the main group in Bogotá to return to the U.S. with the rest of us.

So it was a smaller group that headed back to Buenaventura the next morning. We took the slower "old road" that provided some of the best collecting of the entire trip. It was a happy but exhausted group that pulled into Buenaventura at 10:00 p.m. The next day we retraced our steps to Baja Calima collecting along the way, *Manicaria saccifera*, and possibly the most important find of the day, *Metasocratea hecatonandra*. Dr. Patiño had sent a message to the Experimental Station by radio-telephone, so Dr. Valela knew we were back in the area. Even though Dr. Valela had a number of important guests to entertain, he came down the river from the station to greet us and arranged for two of his best guides to be with us. Upon crossing the river at the village, our plan, this time, was to only penetrate the jungle a few hundred yards. With the help of the guides, five or six palms were collected including *Astrocaryum standleyanum* var. *calimense* armed with ferocious long spines. It was everyone's wish to return again some day to this beautiful, exciting jungle so rich in palms.

As our time was now running out, we returned to Cali and flew on to Bogotá for a day of rest, shopping and final packing of seed. On Sunday, July 7, our entire group boarded an Avianca jet for Miami and home. Even though our trip did not go entirely as scheduled, and certainly there were many more problems than anyone could have imagined, the thrill of the jungle, good fellowship, and of course, excellent palm collecting, made the trip very worthwhile.

Palm Society members who traveled to Colombia: Gerald Batts, Wilson, N.C.; William Bell, Miami, Fla.; David and Marian Besst, Maitland, Fla.; Norman Bezona, Hilo, Hawaii; Jenni Bradley, Laguna Beach, Cal.; Allan Bredeson, Lemon Grove, Cal.; Robert and Madeline Courtney, Tampa, Fla.; Mardy and Cherie Darian, Vista, Cal.; J. Michael Evans, Newport Beach, Cal.; Kenneth Foster, Yorba Linda, Cal.; Gary Hendrix, Miami, Fla.; Donald Hodel, Whittier, Cal.; DeArmand Hull, West Palm Beach, Fla.; Franklyn Ketchum, Huntington Beach, Cal.; Otto Martens, Virginia Beach, Va.; Lois Rossten, Huntington Beach, Cal.; Virginia Ryder, San Francisco, Cal.; Joseph Salerno, Howard Beach, N.Y.; Gordon and Patricia Smith, Maitland, Fla.; Merrill Wilcox, Gainesville, Fla.; Robert and Catherine Wilson, San Vito, Costa Rica; U. A., Ben and Brad Young, Tampa, Fla.

Palms observed on the Colombian trip. An asterisk (*) denotes palms from which seeds were collected.

Cali—Tenerife—Km. 18. *Aiphanes* sp.; **Ceroxylon* sp.; **Chamaedorea* sp.; *Euterpe* sp.; *Sabal mauritiiiformis*; **Scheelea butyracea*; **Syagrus sancona*.

Pasto. **Ceroxylon hexandrum*; *C. utile*; **Euterpe* sp.; **Geonoma* sp.; **Parajubaea cocoides*.

Leticia. **Bactris* sp. (small, clustering); **Bactris* sp. (large, clustering); *Geonoma* sp. (several); **Euterpe* sp.; **Mauritia flexuosa*; **Oenocarpus* sp.; **Socratea* sp.

Buenaventura. *Ammandra decasperma*; **Astrocaryum standleyanum* var. *calimense*; **Attalea allenii*; **Bactris gasipaes*; **Bactris* sp. (clustering); **Bactris* sp. (single); *Euterpe andina*; *Euterpe* sp. (clustering); **Euterpe* sp. (single); **Geonoma* sp. (single, one foot high); *Geonoma* sp.; *Iriartea* sp.; *Jessenia polycarpa*; **Manicaria sacci-*

fera; *Mauritiella pacifica*; **Metasocratea hectonandra*; *Oenocarpus dryander*; **Orbignya cuatrecasana*; *Phytelphas seemannii*; *Socratea exorrhiza*; **Wettinia quinaria*.

I wish again to thank Dr. Victor Patiño of the Jardín Botánico in Cali for his help and assistance; indeed, the trip

would not have been possible without his help. I wish also to thank Dr. Rufino Valela, Director of the Calima Agricultural Experiment Station, Baja Calima, for the courtesy shown our group, and Mr. Allan Bredeson of Lemon Grove, California, who acted as my interpreter. His help was essential.

NEWS OF THE SOCIETY

1974 Biennial Meeting in Miami, Florida

Palm Society members who had arrived in Miami by 6 p.m. Saturday, June 22, 1974 had their first visit with each other at the Reception-Buffer hosted by the Dade County members at the Corbin Education Building at Fairchild Tropical Garden. A gay mood prevailed as new and old-time members greeted each other. Adding to the pleasure of the occasion and giving a foretaste of what was to come were the rare and beautiful potted specimen palms grown by the Garden and used to decorate the area.

Dr. John Popenoe, Director of Fairchild Garden, opened the Garden at 8 a.m. on Sunday, June 23 so members could take advantage of the cooler morning hours as well as enjoy a free tram ride with Paul Drummond acting as narrator. Members then wandered about admiring the hundreds of palms and especially enjoyed a visit to the Rare Plant House. Here are found palms, ferns and many other exotics that need some protection from Miami's occasional cool spells, sometime winds or hot sun. At the registration desk members were delighted to learn that due to the large registration (115 paid member registrations, total attendance including wives and children 170), there would be no charge for the Sunday sandwich lunch or for the Monday box supper.

A delicious and plentiful sandwich lunch was served at noon. Afterwards all adjourned to the Nell Montgomery Garden House. President Foster convened the meeting at 1:30 p.m. He welcomed the many members, especially those from afar such as Dr. V. Santos from Manila, Mr. and Mrs. Michael Carter from England, Mrs. Frances Schobel and Mr. Norman Bezona from Hawaii, Mr. and Mrs. Melvin Sneed from Jamaica, Mrs. M. H. Hilder from St. Croix, Virgin Islands, Anthony Lambe from Portugal and Mr. and Mrs. George Kimber from the Cayman Islands. The others came from all over the U.S. with an especially large contingent from California.

The President, Secretary, Treasurer and Executive Secretary each gave brief reports. Mr. Otto Martens announced that Madame Ganna Walska, Board member, had given him a check for \$1,000 for the society with the stipulation it be used to cover unmet expenses of the Biennial Meeting or for other purposes of the society. President Foster expressed the sentiments of the entire membership when he asked Mr. Martens to thank Madame Ganna Walska warmly for her generous gift.

The President announced that Dr. Jerome Keuper, President of Florida Institute of Technology at Melbourne, Florida had invited the society to hold the 1976 Biennial Meeting on the campus, where the already numerous palm plantings are constantly being added to.

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