

London Calling Edition

2023 MIDTERM MEETING: LONDON

For the first time since 1997, the International Palm Society made an official visit to the historic Palm House, on a glorious day at the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew (a UNESCO World Heritage Site). Our itinerary also included the Chelsea Flower Show, a visit to Martin Gibbons' Palm Centre in Richmond, and a trip across the Surrey Hills to Wakehurst Place (aka "Country Kew").






IPS directors and benefactors fronting the legendary Palm House

An Epic Day at Kew!

On Monday, May 24, 2023 the board of directors, benefactors and invited guests were met by Richard Barley, Director of Gardens. Mr. Barley spoke about the monumental upcoming Palm House remodeling project (third, the first being between 1955 and 1957 and the second between 1984 and 1988). Next Dr. John Dransfield formally opened the mid-term and finally Dr. Bill Baker spoke eloquently about the history of Kew Gardens and specifically about his mentor...John Dransfield.

Slide courtesy of Bill Baker:



Dransfield in numbers

- Ca. 300 publications
- 10 books
- Ca. 400 taxonomic names
 - >160 new species
 - 10 new genera
- >50 expeditions
- 30 years employed at Kew
- 7000 herbarium collections
- 25 graduate students
- 35 years as Editor of *Palms*
- Almost 40 years as an IPS Director

Dr. Baker affirmed: “John’s accomplishments are legion” and that his “legacy of training” is what drew Bill to Kew. Dr. Baker went on to state his admiration for Dr. Dransfield’s early work with rattans; which is why Bill decided to focus on the sequencing of the rattan genera for his PhD studies.

Of course palm species delimitation is an active process with new taxa continuously described. Dr. Baker mentioned the “allure of the Vanilla Coast,” and reported there now are 200 palm species recognized in Madagascar.

Dr. Baker also shared exciting news that the *Palms of New Guinea* book will be published presently. Included will be 250 endemic species. Bill reminisced that this project began with a casual discussion in the office of Dr. Dransfield right here at Kew. The Board was surprised to learn that in this era of electronic publishing, only 300 hardback copies will be printed. So expect fierce competition to obtain one.

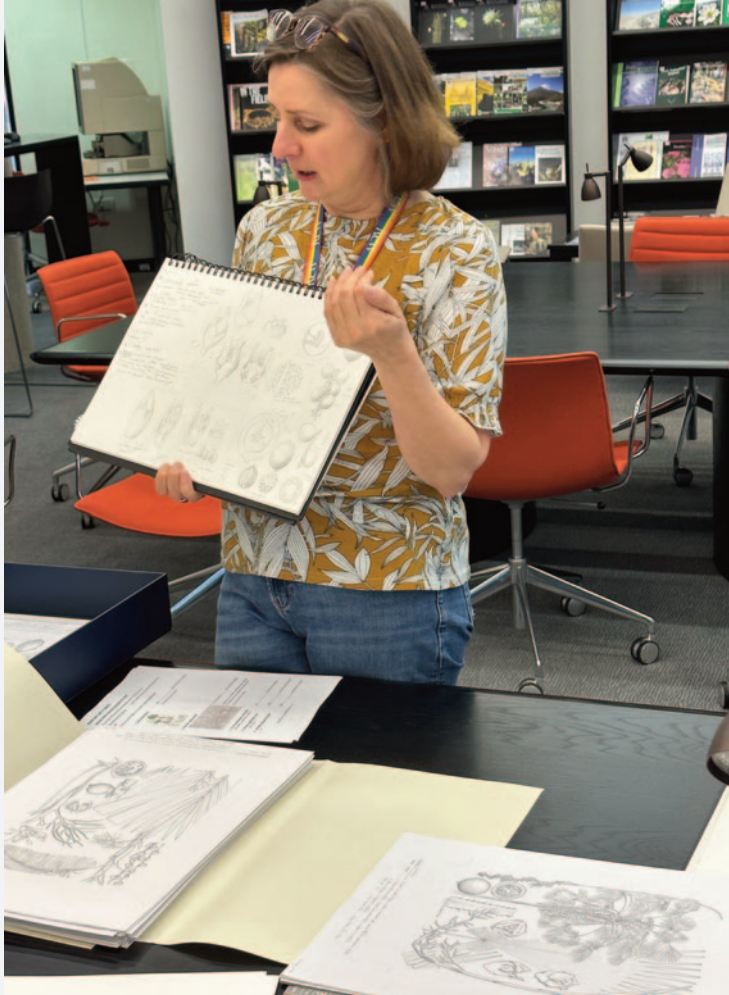
Dr. Dransfield pointing out some of his favorite antique botanical drawings in the Wolfson Rare Books Room of the Palm Library.



Dr. Baker examining an herbarium specimen with annotations and subsequent observations (all hand-written!) by Odoardo Beccari and Sir Joseph Hooker.



In the Palm Room, researchers Drs. Sidonie Bellot and Ben Kuhnhäuser explaining scientific methodology, while former president and IPS benefactor Leland Lai looks on.



The attendees marveled at the fine botanical illustrations by artist Lucy T. Smith. For more, please visit her Etsy site here: [PalmsmithBotanicals](https://www.etsy.com/shop/PalmsmithBotanicals)

Palm House (1848)

Will Spoelstra, Palm House Supervisor, led us on a tour of the beloved Kew Palm House. This Grade I structure (“exceptional interest” per the National Heritage of England) was designed by early Victorian architect Decimus Burton (also responsible for the Temperate House and Waterlily House) and constructed by Irish engineer Robert Turner between 1844 and 1848. Mr. Turner employed recent innovations in shipbuilding, specifically the use of wrought iron beams, and added 16,000 panes of (hand-blown) curved glass to create a functional glass-house which logically resembles a ship’s upturned hull.

About 230 species reside in the Palm House where humidity is maintained above 75% and the minimum temperature is 18°C (vents are activated once temperature exceed 28°C). These atmospheric conditions coupled with continual misting and hand watering creates an artificial environment which Dr. Baker believes “accurately recreates the smell and feel the tropics.” And this was always the intention, for “to experience the Palm House, lush, warm and steamy with the fragrance of moldering vegetation, was to experience firsthand a land that for most (Victorian era) Londoners had existed only in their imagination” (Zona, *Palms* 64(4): 200).

Interestingly, the Palm House is also home to the oldest potted plant in the world, *Encephalartos altensteinii*, a cycad which has been growing at Kews since 1775.

Ravenea moorei, endemic to the Comoros Islands, is a Palm House VIP (Very Important Palm, that is). Please stay tuned to the IPS Newsletter to learn much more about this eligible bachelor in November.



Temperate House (1869, expanded 1899)
... the largest Victorian glasshouse in existence.

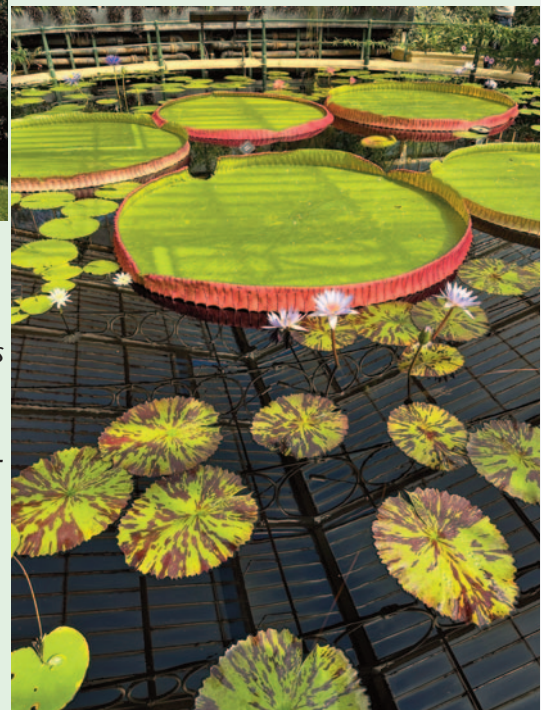
Dave Cooke (Head, Temperate House) with the black tree fern, *Sphaeropteris medullaris* and the "Nikau Palm," *Rhopalostylis sapida* (seen over Dave's left shoulder), both from New Zealand.



The Waterlily House (1852)

Jeff and Christine Brusseau, flanked by *Trachycarpus fortunei*, in front of The Waterlily House.

The jewels within: the giant Amazon waterlily (*Victoria amazonica*), named in honor of Queen Victoria.



Herbarium (1852)

What do a fern collected in the Galápagos Islands by Charles Darwin, baobab bark from Zambezi collected by Dr. Stanley Livingstone (as in “Dr. Livingstone, I presume”), and the first collection of *Tahina spectabilis* (“the palm discovery of the decade”) by our very own Dr. John Dransfield have in common? They are all housed in the Kew Herbarium!

Beginning in 1852, Sir William Hooker used the ground floor of the Georgian styled Hunter House as his personal herbaria and library. However by 1877 a purpose built Victorian structure (the original Kew Herbarium—sited just outside the garden boundaries, between Kew Green and the river Thames) was necessary to accommodate the proliferation of botanical material collected during the expansion of the British Empire. Three additional wings were added; in 1903 (fireproof concrete flooring), 1969, and a fourth in 1989, which completed the quadrangle. The BREEAM certified “modern wing” was built in 2010.



The Kew Herbarium holds over 7 million specimens of vascular plants (a whopping 40,000 are palms). The collection represents 95% of the vascular plant genera and contains 330,000 type specimens (which establish standards for identifying the correct name for a plant). Non-vascular plant specimens were initially stored here, however these were transferred to the Natural History Museum following a 1961 agreement.

The collection spans over 325 years. The oldest specimens were collected in India by Samuel Brown in April, 1696, and more than 20,000 new specimens are registered annually. Dr. Baker explained that the RBG Kew takes a global perspective, collaborating with over 100 countries worldwide. This is apparent in the herbarium where specimens are gladly loaned out for scientific inquiry. Currently Kew is undertaking the monumental and considerate task of digitizing their immense collection. This will afford researchers around the world an unprecedented opportunity to examine specimens online.

While viewing these specimens within the friendly confines of a climate controlled facility, one easily forgets the strength, stamina and determination necessary to procure botanical material, often under very inhospitable circumstances (e.g., heat, humidity and biting insects). Or as Liberty Hyde Bailey once remarked (1933): “The sense of conquest is in it. Not often is a collector able to obtain complete material in one assault. The plant may be at the moment sterile, or only in fruit or flower... but this lack has the advantage of stimulating the collector to go back in another season or year to complete the work.”

Here is a sampling of a few palm holotypes we saw in the herbarium:



Sabinaria magnifica collected by Dr. Gloria Galeano in 2013



Chrysalidocarpus leucomallus collected by Jeff Marcus in 2012.



The Kew Palm Library and the Wolfson Rare Books Room

Prior to 1852, there was no formal library at Kew. However in 1846, the Treasury instituted an annual grant of £10 towards the purchase of books. This has now grown into a formidable collection of botanical texts including 200,000 manuscripts (as early as the 14th century), 5000 periodicals and 20,000 maps.

Here are some highlights:

C.F.P. von Martius, *Historia Naturalis Palmarum*, volume III, plate 129, *Seaforthia ptychosperma* (now *Ptychosperma gracile*), 1823-27.





Joao Barbosa Rodrigues (1842-1909), *Sertum Palmarum Brasiliensium*, volume II, tab 14, *Bactris bifida*, 1903

William Griffith (1810-1845), *Palms of British East India*, plate CCXVI, *Calamus wightii*, 1850. Note how the artist zig-zagged the flagellum to include it in the plate.





Sydenham Edwards (1768-1819), watercolor of *Rhaps flabelliformis* (now *Rhaps excelsa*), plate 1371, *Curtis's Botanical Magazine*, 1811.

In the Neighborhood

Botanists and Garden Directors Sir William Hooker and son Sir Joseph Hooker lived quite near Kew's Jacobean-styled Elizabeth Gate (designed by Decimus Burton as commissioned by Sir William Hooker in 1841 and completed in 1846).

The Hooker home is marked with a blue plaque (used throughout the UK to mark historically significant places).



The Palm Centre in Richmond

Former IPS director Martin Gibbons is certainly well known to the readers of our journal. He has been a frequent contributor to *Principes*, (now *Palms*) and wrote *The Pocket Guide to Palms* published in 2003 (reviewed in *Palms* 48(2): 102. 2004). He is an intrepid palm explorer and as result has brought several new species into cultivation via seed collecting activities (along with current board member Toby Spanner). What many readers may not know is that in 2010 Martin's Palm Centre nursery was awarded "National Collection holder status" by Plant Heritage for having the UK reference collection of all *Trachycarpus* species!

Martin's wife, son Henry, and friend Otto graciously served tea and crumpets to the appreciative directors and guests visiting the nursery.

Martin Gibbons with the massive trunk of *Jubaea chilensis*.





Past-president Bo-Göran Lundqvist and former IPS Director Kim Cyr enjoying the nursery.

Director Andrew Street with the 'Volcano' cultivar of *Chamaerops humilis*.



Wakehurst Place

Redolent with blooming rhododendrons, Japanese maples, woodland trees, and a meadow ablaze with buttercups and orchids, our visit to Wakehurst was enjoyed by all. We were given a brilliant tour by Wakehurst "lifer," Iain Parkinson (head of landscaping), who elegantly guided us around a portion of Wakehurst's 500 plus acres. Wakehurst is jointly run by Kew and the National Trust.



IPS director Gregg Hamman and his wife, Debby, pose next to towering rhododendrons.





Wakehurst has an outstanding collection of trees and shrubs from China, Korea, and Japan.

The Coronation Meadow (2015) was inspired by HRH the Prince of Wales “to plant a meadow of local character in every county to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Queen’s coronation.” Iain entertained us with humorous anecdotes about touring King Charles (then Prince) through this enchanting site.

The benches in the Coronation Meadow are adorned with this stanza from the poem “Leisure” by William Henry Davies:
“What is this life if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare.”

This enchanting meadow reminded me of the first stanza of “In the Forest” by Oscar Wilde:
“Out of the mid-wood’s twilight
Into the meadow’s dawn”



However I digress...we were next treated to a private, behind-the-scenes tour of the Millennium Seed Bank, “the most biodiverse place on earth” with over 2 billion seeds, under the auspices of senior researchers Dr. Elinor Breman and Dr. John Dickey. Seed conservation began at Wakehurst back in 1976.

The Millennium Seed Bank has the capacity to store 75% of the world’s seed bearing flora. Currently the facility houses seed from approximately 6000 genera and over 40,000 plant species.

The Millennium Seed Bank



IPS director Jeff Brusseau poised to enter the gleaming underground vaults. These are reinforced by 20-inch concrete walls making them flood-, bomb-, and radiation-proof. Some storage units are cooled to -20°C.



The RHS Chelsea Flower Show

Every once in a while hard-core palm-nuts can become anthophiles, if only for one spectacular day. And this was exactly what occurred when the IPS descended *en masse* upon the legendary Chelsea flower show for the special members-only preview day. Alas, there were no sightings this year of King Charles, who is an avid gardener and environmentalist. He previously was presented with the Royal Horticultural Society's Victoria Medal of Honour at the Chelsea Flower Show in 2009.

Fun Fact: former IPS Director Iris Bannochie, a Barbadian horticulturalist responsible for creating the Andromeda Botanic Gardens, won the Gold Medal on three occasions at the Chelsea Flower Show.

Predictably your editor gravitated toward the more tropical offerings:

Heliconia 'Splash'





Musa ornata



Sterculia sp., probably *S. foetida*



Variegated *Clivia miniata*

Continuing on the flower theme, we saw some real beauties during the 2022 Hawaii Biennial:

At Floribunda, the flowers of *Brownea macrophylla* erupt directly off the branches.



A perfusion of *Anthurium* at the Andersen garden.



Native to Myanmar, *Amherstia nobilis*, seen at Floribunda.

London Postscript

The International Palm Society thrives on legacies. We are truly fortunate to have veteran directors still actively pursuing the Society's mission, and several were with us for the last London midterm at the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew in 1996 (over a quarter century ago!). These included Dr. John Dransfield, Dr. Bill Baker, along with past presidents Horace Hobbs and Bo-Göran Lundqvist.

Additionally, the 1997 London midterm was the last IPS function attended by longtime executive secretary Theodora (Teddie) Buhler (1910-2006). She and her husband, Theodore (that's right, Teddie and Ted), traveled extensively with the IPS for many decades. Teddie joined the Fairchild Tropical Garden shortly after its inception, and was a founding member of the International Palm Society. Essentially, "she was the face and voice of the Palm Society" throughout the early years (Palms 51(2): 98). Dr. John Dransfield, the 2023 Dent Smith Memorial awardee, recalled that it was Teddie who first welcomed him, by letter, when he joined the Palm Society back in 1969. Although a quick perusal of our past presidents page (click here) may suggest an old boys' club, it was Teddie, along with Lucita Wait, who were the female foundation that kept our society running. In fact, they are the first two signees on the IPS articles of incorporation!



Mrs. Theodore C. Buhler, Executive Secretary
of The Palm Society.

News from the IPS Midterm Board Meeting in London

A motion was made, seconded, and passed by the board of directors during the London midterm on Wednesday, May 24, 2023 concerning new benefactor dues and elimination of new lifetime memberships.

1. Effective January 1, 2024, the benefactor level membership will be raised from \$2500 to \$5000. Benefits include:
 - a. lifetime membership with the IPS.
 - b. first in line (after directors) for IPS travel.
 - c. exclusive travel opportunities reserved only for benefactor level members.
2. The lifetime membership category (previously \$1000) is no longer offered.
3. All current lifetime members (about 135 in total) may pay an additional \$1500 to become benefactor level members. This offer ends on December 31, 2023. These modifications will NOT be retroactive, and will NOT in any manner affect previously promised member benefits at any level.

So essentially the benefactor membership, which is currently \$2500, will be raised to \$5000 effective January 1, 2024. Therefore now is the time to consider upgrading your membership. Additionally, if you are a lifetime member, a one time donation of \$1500 prior to December 31 will make you a benefactor level member, something we hope that you will strongly consider doing.

New IPS Benefactors

We are happy to welcome the following new IPS Benefactor:

Mr. Jeffrey DeMott, Florida.



Travel with the IPS

The International Palm Society's 33rd Biennial destination: NEW CALEDONIA in 2024

Sunday, September 22 to Monday September 30, 2024 (8 days!).

Capacity 150.

Expected to sell-out.

Registration tentatively opens late August, 2023.

Coincidentally, when the Board of Directors last met in Richmond, Surrey, UK on May 17, 1997 four new affiliate chapters were introduced. One of them was Association Chambeyronia in New Caledonia! We are thrilled to open registration later this month for the International Palm Society's 33rd Biennial Meeting: New Caledonia.

Please join six former IPS presidents (representing a combined tenure of 24 years!) and one current president, all planning on taking advantage of this genuinely rare travel opportunity



Travel with the IPS

From Dr. Lazaro Priegues

“Hi Folks. I was in New Caledonia with IPS in 2000. It was my first biennial. I was so impressed by the tour that I decided to keep travelling with IPS henceforth, and have never been disappointed. That New Caledonia trip was absolutely amazing. As much as I have travelled the world in search of palms, I have never been so blown away by the variety of palms (and other living things) as well as by the exotic locations within New Caledonia that we visited that I could not have gotten into myself if it were not for IPS - as you need permission from tribes to enter their territory. The food there was wonderful, and it was not too hot as it lies close to the Tropic of Cancer. I never thought that I would ever go back, but I was absolutely riveted when I heard that we are indeed planning to go back to the Land That Time Forgot. I would not miss this opportunity for anything in the world, as there is no guarantee that this biennial will ever repeat itself. Do yourself a favor and start planning for the trip.”

The 2022 Maui pre-Biennial. tour, the 2023 London midterm meeting, and the 2023 Réunion Island mini-biennial all sold out. The much anticipated 2024 New Caledonia Biennial is expected to do the same. If you're interested in attending, consider registering early.

Teaser photo: habitat shot of the incomparable Pierson family palm, *Chambeyronia piersoniorum*, in New Caledonia (photo compliments of Gilles Pierson).



Parting Shot

"Palms, the loftiest and noblest of all vegetable forms, that to which the prize of beauty has been assigned by the concurrent voice of nations in all ages; from the earliest civilization of mankind..." From *Equinoctial Regions of America*, Alexander von Humboldt, 1894.

A huge thank you to Drs. Dransfield and Baker for creating a very memorable London mid-term. Here are Bill and John in southern California, in 2003, registering their delight at seeing *Ephedra californica* in the wild. Photo by Dr. Scott Zona

