

29 SEP 1989

SOCIETY FOR GROWING AUSTRALIAN PLANTS

INDIGENOUS CYCAD AND PALM STUDY GROUP

NEWSLETTER NO. 39

Leader: Len Butt - Phone No. 07 8483515

Assistant: Brian Runnegar - Phone No. 07 2861164

CALAMUS, IT'S CARE & USES

Some of the world's fine cane ware and woven basketry comes from the dead stems of the climbing Rattan or Calamus palms. There are some 375 species throughout tropic rainforest and many hundred tonnes are harvested annually for the basket and furniture trade. Here in Australia we merely have 8 species, but these are not to be belittled as they include some of the finest. Not many are used here in industry but probably at least 30 tonnes of cane is put into production.

The very attractive and ornamental seed of even Australian species is often sought after by fruit eating birds, which help to spread the various species. When the first settlers first encountered the Calamus it was to curse the long tendrils of sharp recurved hook spines which tore their skin and caused them to 'Wait-a-while'. This common name sticks with the genus to this very day.

Calamus aruensis occurs here and New Guinea but the Australian species is in the extreme north of the Cape York peninsular in deep rain forest and around creek banks. It has 3 metre fronds on extremely long canes and its fruit is sought after by native pigeons. It is little known in cultivation but will grow well in well drained organic mixes. It is extremely tropical and only suited to Australian tropic areas.

Calamus moti the yellow lawyer cane is sometimes mistaken for aruensis or radicalis, but the yellow bayonet like covering thorns of this species are unique. The long flagella is fiercely armed and often used as fish hook material by aborigines. This rattan has huge long fronds and the many stems combine in a clump fashion to give the appearance of an extremely tall clumping palm.

As a young potted palm it has great potential being quite frost resistant and despite its tropic origin can be grown in warm temperate climates. Only fresh seed is viable and this only for a short period.

Calamus hollrungii

Is a tall rattan with a rather straggling habit, it grows in rain forests of the wet monsoons. It is the main rattan of Mission Beach and Dunk Island and probably is the one associated with the dense groves of *Licuala ramsayii*. Young potted specimens are quite attractive. All *Calamus* need shade situations generally sheltered from frost by other trees.

* * * * *

Len Butt - Lepidozamia hopei - Regel

Reputed to be the tallest of all the zamiaceae this very tropical companion plant to *L. peroffskyana* of the South-east Queensland rainforests is an outstanding species occurring along the tropical coast of Queensland. Locality is approximately from Ingham districts up to Cooktown and districts. Because of reports about it, I visited Paronella Park near Innisfail in 1980 and there found really unusual, but outstanding specimens.

Paronella Park is the accomplished dream of José and Margerita Paronella and the format is a spanish castle beside Mena Creek Falls. Here, tropical plants still flourish, and the native *Bowenia spectabilis* reaches its maximum size, undisturbed *Lepidozamia hopei* is also there, and quite a few specimens have grown and blended into the architectural structure. One such about 15 metres high adorns a public loo fashioned like a castle tower. This has a two headed trunk and its shiny fronds reach nearly to the ground. Like all specimens I have seen, this *Lepidozamia* has a much narrower caudex than is apparent in *L. peroffskyana* being no more than 25 cm in diameter measuring half way up the trunk. The latter being nearly twice that width.

Another specimen photographed at Cape Tribulation, was about 10 metres to the lowest fronds with 20 shiny fronds, glossy green and definitely palm like. This plant was growing quite close to the actual water in a deep narrow creek bank.

I also came across small plants to 1 metre high growing in top of the steep creek bank. Bill Shewin an early member of PASCOA took the Cape Tribulation photo.

Lepidozamia being true gymnosperms do not produce flowers. There are separate male and female plants which produce conifer like cones. The male cones are cylindrical. Female cones are up to 60 cm long and 25 cm's in diameter, roughly ovoid in shape. They have numerous glossy green fronds which rise sub-erect, the pinnae curled and pubescent of a deep fawn colour, later the hardened fronds are spreading and 2 to 3 metres in length giving a spread from side to side 150 and 200 with a width of 17 to 30 mm broad and 40 cm's long. This makes each pinnule about approximately twice as wide as those on *peroffskyana*. Inside the large cone of the female red seed is in pairs 6 cm long by 3.5 cm thick. Other specimens I examined were at Sugar cane Creek between Tully and Wongaling Beach. Correct nomenclature appears to have been from 1865. It's temperature tolerance is from 10c to 35c. This impressive zamiad occurs also along the Daintree River and Rockingham Bay and grown on edges of rainforest. Some large specimens were felled when the controversial Government road was in progress.

Like all *Lepidozamia* the ripe seed is completely covered by the sporophyll casing and only visible when this splits open on ripening. The strangest phenomenon about *L. hopei* is that fossil records taken from tertiary strata in a brown coal field at Lucifer Field, Bacchus Marsh, Victoria. Several clear fossils of a very similar zamiad were revealed during 1947 - 1948. Named *Lepidozamia hopeites* (Cooksen) it showed unmistakable resemblance to *L. hopei* clear evidence that Victoria may once have been tropical.

Cycas Data Sheet

1. Identification. _____

2. Habitat. _____

3. Trunk. Ht. _____ Dia. _____ PLB. _____ Branching. _____

Suckering _____

4. Female Cone. Sp./crown _____ . Ovules/sp. _____ ave, _____ max.

Ht. of sp. _____ . Seed Color _____ orig. _____ ripe.

5. Male Cone. Ht. _____ Dia. _____ (1/4), _____ (1/2) _____ (3/4).

Peduncle ht. _____ Dia. _____ , Spor. rows _____ horizontal
_____ vertical.

6. Leaves. No./flush _____ . Length leaf _____ rachis _____ .

Spines _____ No. per in. _____ . Spines located _____ .

7. Leaflets. Pairs/leaf _____ . Length at top _____ middle _____

bottom _____ . Decurrent _____ . Midrib _____ .

Color/luster _____ .

8. Other. _____

Contributed by _____
