

ASGAP PALM & CYCAD STUDY GROUP

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New Members : Welcome to new member Bernard Crow, of 38 Gladly Street, Innisfail, Qld. 4860. Hope you were not hit too hard by the recent cyclone.

Good Books : I have mentioned all these in past newsletters, as they came out, but for the benefit of newer members, here are a few picks. The best book on Australian cycads is 'Cycads of Australia', by Hill & Osborne, 2001, Kangaroo Press, 116 pages.

Perhaps the best book on cycads of all countries is 'The Cycads', by Loran M. Whitelock, 2002, Timber Press (Portland, Oregon), 374 pages. Was about US \$ 60.

Perhaps the best general book on palms of all countries is 'An Encyclopedia of Cultivated Palms', by Robert Lee Riffle, 2003, Timber Press, 528 pages. Was US \$ 50.

For Australians, the best society is 'The Palm and Cycad Societies of Australia' (PACSOA), PO Box 1134, Milton, Qld. 4064, with branches in Brisbane, the Sunshine Coast, S.A., W.A. Mackay, Rockhampton & Darwin, & an affiliate in Sydney. Since most palm species come from outside Australia, most of their articles refer to exotic species. Their colour journal, 'Palms & Cycads', comes out roughly 4 times a year. The Sept. 2005 issue includes an article on the Townsville Palmetum. Society membership costs about \$ 40 a year.

Short Newsletter : This is a very short newsletter because my own palms have been doing little of interest, & either botanists have taken a rest from re-naming things, or I have not caught up with the news yet. I am sure some DNA work is going on, if nothing else. I was knocked out of action by prostate cancer for a little while, but had the whole prostate cut out in August, with minimal complications. However after Christmas I got a good dose of Barmah Forest Virus, which re-activated the Ross River Fever I had 3 years ago, & I have only just come good again. Both viruses cause 'chronic fatigue' type symptoms, & linger for a few months, & in my case trigger a bout of depression for a while. As a result I have not been out & about much to see what is going on. And of course the drought means all watering, & I have about 3 acres of garden/nursery, has to be by hand-held hose or by bucket. I am not on town water, so have not turned my sprinklers on for over 3 years, & some fixed raised sprinklers have been inactive for a decade.

Articles : The October-December 2005 (no. 89) issue of 'Palms & Cycads', pages 10-11, contains an article by John Price summarising some recent papers on the effect of drying of palm seeds upon their subsequent germination. In general, species from semi-arid areas are little affected by drying out, & then dry storage, but palms from wet areas, like Phoenix roebelinii from S-E Asian jungles, have their seeds killed. Some palms from semi-arid or savannah areas germinate better in the presence of light. Dry seed usually germinates better if soaked for a few days before sowing. And of course most, perhaps all, palms from hot climates germinate faster & better at 30 degrees C. or so. I have been told by a reliable source that seed of *Hydriastele ramsayi* (until recently *Gronophyllum ramsayi*; see newsletter no. 89), from Arnhem Land & some nearby areas in the N.T., germinates best if placed in a metal box on one's ute dashboard for a month or two to heat up nicely before sowing. Otherwise germination is erratic to dreadful. I don't know if this recipe works outside the tropics, if one's seeds cool down overnight, or whether the vehicle's vibration is the critical component. Obviously desiccation does not matter in this case.

Will Kraa, a very competent Brisbane palm & cycad nurseryman, has a note in the October-December 2003 issue (no. 81) of the same magazine, on picking the right moment to artificially pollinate *Lepidozamia peroffskyana*. I also have found this difficult, as the female cone hardly opens when ready to be pollinated. 'The way to tell when the cones are ready is to test them regularly when they are still relatively undeveloped. This can be done by seeing if it is possible to move the scales of the cones. ... When receptive the scales can be moved apart slightly & there is a slight cracking sound as they are moved. This is the time to pollinate them but it does not appear possible to get the pollen in. What I have found very effective is to collect a quantity of pollen in a small container & get a short length of small diameter plastic tube (about 3-4 mm) & push it into the pollen. It should be possible to pack some pollen into the end

of the tube. The tube is then forced between the slightly parted scales till it is inside the centre of the cone. ... Now blow forcefully into the free end of the tube & pollen will be seen escaping from between the scales. I have usually found that it is possible to get 100% pollination by this means.' Macrozamia open quite wide when receptive. Cycad pollen remains viable for many months when stored dry in a small plastic container in a refrigerator. I have found it difficult to tell when some *Dioon* species (from Africa) are receptive.

In the January-March 2006 (no. 90) issue of the same magazine there is a short article by John Price titled 'Notes & News: Two subspecies of *Licuala ramsayi*.' In a recent article in 'Palms', once 'Principes', Barford & Dowe (2005 *Palms* 49:15-23) describe what many of us have long known was a separate form of *L. ramsayi*. The 'new' subspecies, *tuckeri*, is named after Robert Tucker, the designer & first curator of 'The Palmetum' at Townsville, who died relatively young. The following features distinguish the 2 : in ssp. *ramsayi* the leaf sheath disintegrates into a fibrous mesh whereas in *tuckeri* it stays attached to the leaf ; in *ramsayi* the petiole is conspicuously spiny, & in *tuckeri* the spines are small & mainly confined to the petiole base ; in *ramsayi* the more basal flowers appear in groups of 2-4 & usually in November-January, while in *tuckeri* they are usually solitary & appear throughout the year. The easiest to grow is subspecies *tuckeri*, now probably the commonest in cultivation in the last decade. It comes from north of Cooktown in coastal Cape York, while *ramsayi* 'occurs south of Cooktown & down to Hinchinbrook Island with populations in the Cape-Tribulation-Daintree River areas, Russell & Johnstone River Systems & at Mission Beach.' I have heard some members of the Cairns branch of PACSOA claim that there should be a third taxon of *L. ramsayi* recognised, based on traits such as clumping versus non-clumping & small petiole spines versus no spines, but John Dowe is a thorough sort of guy so 2 is probably enough. You have to look at a lot of plants (& populations) in the wild in order to know where to set valid boundaries.

Letters from Members : An August 2005 letter from Don Stallard, who has been interested in cycads for a long time, promised me some interesting images for my website, including a monster specimen of *M. eneabba* (formerly sp. *Jurian Bay*) located between *Jurian Bay* & *Eneabba*. He was then spending time at *Kununurra* in the East Kimberleys (I leave the plural 's' in as that is what everyone said when I was young, & Kimberley reminds me of the African location, & some girls' names), & had been visiting the local *C. pruinosa*, & *C. basaltica* up on the Mitchell Plateau. He thinks some of the populations around *Kununurra* 'may need to be assessed as there appear to be some obvious differences within the species with locations. (Lake Argyll & Middle Springs).' I have briefly looked at *C. pruinosa* at Lake Argyll, & if I remember rightly that site has both blue & green-leaved plants. Botanist Ken Hill puts that difference down to the presence (blue) or absence of a waxy coating to the leaf, & found in some areas all plants were blue, in others green. & in some areas both. Don would know that, & thus would be referring to other differences.

How about a letter or email from some of you others ? My computer, or more likely Microsoft Word, insists on putting my email address in red letters which photocopy poorly, so I shall repeat it with non-existent blanks between the words. krathie @ powerup .com .au

Best Wishes : May it rain on all your gardens & on all those parched dam catchments.