

Executive Summary - Palms: Their Conservation and Sustained Utilization

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The palm family (Palmae, or more recently Arecaceae), comprising some 2200 species, is distributed throughout the tropics and subtropics. While exhibiting a tremendous morphological diversity, palms are mainly found in the understory of cloud and rain forests, occurring mostly in tropical Asia and America.

The objectives of this Action Plan are to identify the most threatened palm species, to present recommendations for conservation that cater to their specific requirements, and to provide strategic guidelines for the conservation and sustainable utilization of the many palms that provide food, construction materials, and an important source of revenue for many people.

The increasing demands on the world's natural resources pose a serious threat to palm biodiversity. The two main threats are over-exploitation and habitat destruction. For example, the use of rattan palms in furniture making has caused dramatic population decline for numerous species which, in turn, has had severe impacts on local and international markets, not to mention local biodiversity. Species used for edible palm hearts, timber and fiber, and ornamental plants are others whose populations are in serious decline. This Action Plan identifies where extraction is sustainable and where, on the contrary, over-exploitation may lead to extinction.

Habitat destruction poses a more permanent and widespread threat to palms throughout the world, but particularly in tropical cloud and rainforests. Species whose habitat range is limited to a small area are most at risk. The situation is particularly alarming for those species restricted to islands. Of the 224 Endangered palm species identified in this Action Plan, 141 are restricted to islands (including 69 species from Madagascar and 19 from Borneo). Eleven of these are representatives of distinct monotypic genera and therefore are of special concern. Invasive species pose a distinct threat to numerous island palms as well.

Chapters one through five of this Action Plan give background information on the palm family including the taxonomy, distribution patterns, and references to the important literature on the family. The importance of taxonomic knowledge, habitat protection, and ex situ conservation is discussed in the context of the overall conservation of palms.

Regional overviews with specific country accounts are presented in chapters six through eleven. These accounts highlight the most endangered species, provide specific recommendations for conservation action, and indicate where more research is urgently needed before even remedial action can be taken. Chapter twelve summarizes and prioritizes the conservation actions discussed earlier. Among the top priorities are:

- Compilation of conservation checklists for the Atlantic Forest of Brazil and the forests of Irian Jaya and Papua New Guinea, followed by the establishment of appropriate conservation management plans;

- Implementation of management plans for endangered palms in Madagascar and the Mascarenes, as well as on the islands of Vanuatu, Fiji, and Hawaii;
- Rescue actions for other palms on the verge of extinction in Cuba, India, Sri Lanka, and Malaysia;
- Field studies to assess conservation status and requirements of a large number of palms with Unknown or Indeterminate status.

The Palm Action Plan is intended for use by conservationists in all sectors of society including scientists, policy makers, government officials, educators, planners, and grant awarding bodies. Scientists are encouraged to use this Action Plan in direct consultation with policy makers, government officials, and grant awarding bodies when developing their research projects. Government officials and policy makers in turn may use the project ideas to develop plans for high-profile (and effective) conservation initiatives. Many of the projects presented in the Plan have the potential for student involvement as well.

While members of the Palm Specialist Group will endeavor to stimulate the implementation of the recommendations made here, they would encourage readers to share this Action Plan with others who have an interest in palms and their conservation.

Reprinted from *Palms: Their Conservation and Sustained Utilization*.