

ANPSA PALM & CYCAD STUDY GROUP

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**Dilatory newsletter editor :** I got snowed under by other things, so 2008 passed me by. I shall update my records to show everyone as paid up for 2008.

**New species or a Hybrid ? :** When in Darwin last June, the excellent retail nursery Allora Gardens Nursery had for sale (expensively, compared to their other native cycads) a number of attractive cycads with shortish fronds with crowded pinnae, all supposedly collected on Bathurst Island. (Tiwi tribal country). Hill & Osborne's book, 'Cycads of Australia', lists only *Cycas armstrongii* as occurring on the Tiwi islands, & these were certainly not that, as the pinnae were more crowded, the caudices thicker, & the pinna colour a dull green, not the lighter lettuce green of *armstrongii*, nor the bluey-green of its much rarer variant colour. On the mainland to the west, *Cycas machonochiei* abounds, & Hill & Osborne mention hybrids between the two species. I have wondered if the 'blue' *armstrongii* plants were of that origin, but they look identical to the green ones in all other respects, & seem to occur sporadically in most areas where *C. armstrongii* exists. *C. maconochiei* ssp. *maconochiei*, the most easterly subspecies of the species, has long fronds & stout caudices, & new fronds are a most distinctive range of blue shades, at first also with a rusty tomentum, & turning later to a dull green. I would have expected hybrids between the 2 species to be longer in the frond, & stouter generally. If I had not known their origin, I would have expected the nursery plants to perhaps be a form of *C. arnhemica*. Unless coning, it is very difficult to identify many cycads. Cone size & shape, & in particular megasporophyll shape, are usually very characteristic. The megasporophylls are much-modified leaves which bear the seeds on female plants. Of the Territory cycads, only *C. calcicola*, *C. conferta* & *C. armstrongii* are instantly recognisable, & *C. maconochiei* at its blue-frond stage. My brother moved to Brisbane last September, & brought many cycads with him, including one of the 'hybrids' mentioned above, so I may see a fruiting plant in due course. It is currently dormant.

**Cycads moved from Darwin :** Among the cycads my brother moved from Darwin to Kurwongba on the north side of Brisbane were quite a few natives, which have settled in quite well for the most part. Some *Cycas armstrongii* plants are currently leafless, but others are leafed up, as are several *C. maconochiei* & a lone *C. angulata* with a short (30 cm) but massive trunk. The alleged 'Bathurst Island' cycad is still leafless. Specimens of several exotic cycads are thriving, including *Cycas rumphii*, *C. taitungensis*, *C. pectinata*, *Dioon spinulosum*, *D. mejiae*, & various small *Zamia* species.

**Books For Sale :** From the cessation of the SGAP-Qld. Book sales service, & a book store dispersal, I have a few books available should anyone want them. I have 1 copy of 'The Cycads' by Loran Whitelock, the best book I know on cycads in general, at \$80 posted, 1 copy of 'Genera Palmarum' by Uhl & Dransfield, at \$70, & 4 copies of 'Cycads of Australia' by Hill & Osborne, at \$35. All of these were originally substantially dearer, & are still top reference books. There are some new books out on cycads, but in German or Afrikaans, so I have not read them.

In the Sept. '07 issue of 'Palms & Cycads' no. 96 there is a review (pp. 26-27) of a new book, 'Cycads of Vietnam', by Roy Osborne, Ken Hill, Hiep T. Nguyen & Loc Phan Ke. There are now 27 *Cycas* species known in Vietnam, 15 being endemic to Vietnam, & 10 were only described in 2004. Some are trunkless dwarves. The book contains over 200 photos. John Dowe is writing a book on the palms of Australia & of Christmas, Lord Howe & Norfolk Islands. Due out late 2009, with 280 pages & 300 images.

**Casualties from the July 2007 freeze :** Everything I thought was dead then has proved permanently so, including my 10 *Cycas angulata*, my sole *C. arnhemica*, & all *Archontophoenix* & *Laccospadix* not moved into my wet patch (watered every 2 days in hot weather, for the benefit of my non-hardy ferns), except for *A. cunninghamii* & *A. purpurea* palms over 15 years old.

**Items from other societies :** The October 2007 issue of 'Palms & Cycads' contains a report by John Dowe on F.M. Bailey's palm botany & his ascent of Mt. Bellenden-Ker, Queensland's second highest mountain in 1889. Bailey described 11 Australian taxa, 7 of which are still in use, while 4 are now synonyms. The 7 are *Oraniopsis appendiculata*, *Calamus moti*, *C. australis*, *Hydriastele wendlandiana*, *Livistona benthamii*, *L. muelleri* & *Linospadix palmerianus*. John is now at the Aust. Centre for Tropical Freshwater Research at James Cook Uni.

The same issue, pp. 19-22, has a note on Qld's bid to have a second UNESCO Biosphere area (Noosa Shire was the first) with its core as the D'Aguilar National Park, plus surrounding areas, such as the *Lepidozamia peroffskyana* zone near Mt. Glorious. The female cones are the 'largest of any gymnosperm, living or extinct,' up to 40 kg. Some were recorded with trunks up to 6 m tall in 1936, but current specimens are 2m.

The same journal, no. 99, June '08, has an article by Will Kraa, pp. 12-14, on palms as weeds. Cocos palms are deservedly a declared weed in S-E Qld. *Archontophoenix alexandrae* seedlings ignore Roundup & are spreading in some areas. On p. 23 there is a note on germination of three date palm seeds from the famous Jewish fortress at Mt. Masada, destroyed by the Romans in AD 73. One seedling thrived. Other seeds were C dated at 2000 +/- 50 years.

In the same journal, no. 100, July '08, John Price, PP.10-11, gave details on a newly discovered 12 m hapaxanthic (flowering then dying) fan palm, *Tahina spectabilis*, in a dry part of Madagascar.

In the next issue, no. 101, October '08, the Prices comment on H.S. Rai *et al's* article 'Inference of higher-order relationships in the cycads from a large chloroplast data set—Molecular Phylogenetics & Evolution 29 (2003) 350-359.' All living gymnosperms are monophyletic. Gymnosperms go back to at least 230 million yrs ago (Mya), angiosperms to c 130 Mya. The cycads closest living relative is the ginkgo from China, which can live for 3500 years. It grows at 30 cm a year for 30 years, then crawls to its final height of 30 m.

In the same journal, no. 102, Jan. '09, pp. 4-8, John Dowe looked at palm damage from cyclone Larry in March 2006 at 3 sites. The heaviest casualties in the common *Archontophoenix alexandrae* were in stemmed but sub-canopy palms, with 60% having snapped trunks from flying debris. The same issue contains nice photos of *Livistona fulva*, pp.21-24, & notes on *Oraniopsis* on p. 25. It is very slow growing, but 'this is also an advantage since seedlings make excellent understory plants, very attractive & also quite cold hardy to several degrees of frost. You never have to worry that they will get too tall!'

The same journal, no. 103, p. 27, has a photo of a seed of *Cycas media* ssp. *banksii* which had produced 2 seedlings. I used to know a chap who grew *Phoenix roebelinii* seedlings in vast quantities, & he got 2-stemmed seedlings at a rate of c1 in 1000, & 3-stemmed at a rate of c1 in 20000. I still have my 3-stemmer, now 25 yrs old.

Also in the same journal, no. 91, April 2006, was a report that at the International Symposium on Palm Biology in London in April '05, some *Livistona eastonii* were recorded as over 700 years old, & *Chamaerops humilis*, the European fan palm, has been found to attract pollinators by the scent emitted from its leaves.

May you all have a pleasant, & hopefully wet, summer. Kerry.