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SOCIETY FOR GROWING AUSTRALIAN PLANTS

CYCAD & ZAMIAD STUDY GROUP

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Hi! friends,

Christmas again is very much with us and here goes again the newsletter. First things first, and it seems that the thoughts about including palms in our study group is not going to be successful. Everyone did not venture an opinion of course, but our really active members of whom there are too few really had a say. Incidentally I did not even get an opinion from the groups co-ordinator!

It is a pity, and if any SGAP member is game to start a separate palm group I will join also.

However, let it be said I understand dissenting opinions and really agree that the two genus are streets apart. Cycads have really more affinity to tree-ferns than they do to palms!

The study group will stay as is and let us hope we can start the New Year with at least 20 active members? Come on all members how much time does it take to pen 100 words, even if it is just how you are growing your own seedlings. If you think you are busy I'll send you a list of my own chores to compare!

The SGAP bus trek went across Australia and came back in the prescribed time once again. This time they carried a map plus directions. However I only received one or two reports and a photo of a very blue fronded cycas in the Lake Argyle area. I was unable to accompany them and I guess most were angiosperm people not gymnosperm people.

Here are a few reports I have received from zamiad people, and unfortunately not all belong to our group.

Stan Walkley, well known member of a Palm & Cycad Society comments on seeing large specimens of cycas at Gloucester Park near Dingo Beach. These he reports are Cycas normanbyana. I know there is controversy as to whether this exists and that maybe it is Cairnsiana, but I have also seen these plants. They are really magnificent, growing in two long rows, stout trunked and broad fronded. The differences to other cycas was quite marked, similarities to Cycas revoluta (assam) very evident. Male cones I saw were central, apex, and bright orange about size of cone on a large media. The male cone on the chinese sago plant is much larger and very different. Robert Tucker a local taxonomy expect also, labelled these as c. normanbyana!

If any member can get a copy of Charles Joseph Chamberlain's book "The Living Cycads", 1919, a new world of understanding about these plants will open up! He believed that they definitely are the seed-bearing ferns and relative to the cycadofilicales of 300 million years ago! All modern botanists are dubious about this statement. However in his book, Chamberlain goes to intricate detail to list similarities between the fern family and the cycadales.

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He states that if the evolutionary calendar of these genera was lined up it would start with Cycas and end with zamia. Placing Cycas first, because the Paleozoic cycadofilicales of earliest fossil records bore their seed around modified leaf structures and this by slow process evolved as a branch from the true ferns. The cone of today is vastly different and although Chamberlain put forward a theory of how this evolved - It is easy to see that the Cycas even today has persistently retained this primitive type of female modified leaf (sporophyll) which characterized the most ancient seed plants!

Not much has been written regarding Cycas and most botanists mentioning them, do so, to point out mainly there toxic, cattle paralysing qualities!

What a pity, because obviously here with us is the oldest links of vegetative material to exist on our Earth.

Further theorising on evolutionary trends, C.J. Chamberlain explains that the Mesozoic Bennetitales about 200 million years ago are the ancestors of our zamiaceae. He places CYCAS much earlier.

He says that both were derived from a form in which both female leaf sporophylls were leaf like and in loose crowns. The Bennetitales (CYCADOIDEA) retaining theprimitive male spore container and cycas the primitive female sporophyll appendage.

Worth a visit if you live around Brisbane. A good specimen of the (ASSAM) Cycas revoluta male and female flowering together. Where? Mt. Cootha Botanic Gardens, near the entrance. Special notes from Mrs. Bosworth of Ingham. She states she has just recently come back from a trip to Weipa. She says, 1 to 2 hours out from Weipa we passed through some recently burnt country hill-slopes and there were hundreds of cycas all out in bright green new leaf and they really looked beautiful. There were much smaller than Cycas media around Ingham - Trunk quite thin and no very high ones. New leaves were still smaller also but they were very young but past the soft stage. No seed or male cones.

They seem to resemble C. armstrongii - (Don Stallard met Mrs Bosworth, and states he covered similar area but did not find hillside of cycas)

Don Stallard writes that it seems from my own reports on cycas caudex failure by rot, they need to acclimatise over a long period to adapt to the 2 to 3 month of cold as south as Brisbane.

He also states that in November he returned from a trip to Iron Range (Cape York) with a friend from Cairns. At Iron Range National Park - Spent 2 to 3 days bird watching then came back south through Lakefield National Park and in to Cooktown.

Returned then to Cairns via the CREB track. Observed two local species of cycads one of which appeared to extend all the way up the Great Dividing Range well north of Cooktown.

Thank you, Don and also Mrs. Bosworth.