
**The Palm Book of Trinidad and Tobago, Including the
Lesser Antilles**

By Paul Comeau, Yasmin Comeau, Winston Johnson
Trinidad and Tobago: the International Palm Society.

108 p.

Twice in his short forward John Dransfield of the Royal Botanic

Gardens Kew calls this publication a “beautiful” book – and that is true; it is beautiful. One might call it stunningly beautiful because of the high quality printing, layout and binding, the attractive subject matter, the large number of excellent colour photographs and faithfulness with which the pictures convey not only the shapes and colours of the living palms, but also the mood of the localities in which they grow, e.g. the quiet intimacy of rain forest or the hint of menace of the windswept south coast of Trinidad. However, it is also a scientific book and a thorough book. First, it is scientific. The 22 native palms and two introduced ones are described in detail with coloured pictures to complement the descriptions and illustrate, for most of them, not only the whole plant but also the inflorescence, fruit and spines, if any. The names are the ones in current use, each with the author of the names well as the Latin binomial. A table on page four gives the classification of the palms and a map gives the distribution of each species. Four pages of references identify the sources of information. Herein lay two surprises. More than half of the references are concerned with dispersers, the animals that eat palm fruit, and the first surprise was the variety of the animals involved. One might expect to find, as I did, oilbirds, monkeys, rodents, toucans, parrots and the like among these, but fish, iguanas and tortoises were entirely unexpected. The second surprise was sheer determination with which the authors pursued the information they wanted. A reference in Portuguese to

an unpublished thesis in the Universidade de Brasilia is a measure of this. Less is known of the pollinators, a circumstance that should stimulate local naturalists to fill the gaps in our knowledge of this aspect of palm ecology.

The five species that occur in the Lesser Antilles, but not in either Trinidad or Tobago, receive less lavish treatment, but each is illustrated, four of them with more than one picture. Two tables give details of distribution and botanical features.

Lastly, the book is thorough. This is evident in many features: a key to the identification of the native palms; two sections on the meaning and origin of both the botanical and common names; a list with the location and date of every photograph; a topographic map giving the location of every place name mentioned in the text; a list of all the introduced palms giving their botanical names, common names and country of origin, grouped according to botanical features; a very comprehensive index which runs to nine pages. Nothing seems to have escaped the authors’ attention.

This book will immediately become the most comprehensive and authoritative guide to the palms of Trinidad, Tobago and the Lesser Antilles. I foresee that it will be consulted, read, treasured for many years to come.

Victor Quesnel

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