Montgomery Botanical NEWS

Advancing Research, Conservation, and Education through Scientific Plant Collections

Spring/Summer 2013 *Volume 21, Number 1*

Sabal Seekers

To advance science, education & conservation of tropical plants, emphasizing palms and cycads, Montgomery Botanical Center grows living plants from around the world in population-based, documented, scientific collections in a 120-acre botanical garden exemplifying excellent landscape design.

Montgomery Botanical Center is a tax-exempt, nonprofit institution established by Eleanor "Nell" Montgomery Jennings in memory of her husband, Colonel Robert H. Montgomery, and his love of palms and cycads.

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From the Executive Director

Dear Friends,

What an OUTSTANDING year! Montgomery made exceptional progress on fieldwork, research, conservation and education.

The facing page exemplifies the great collaborative botany we do – working with friends and colleagues in Miami, around the USA and internationally, integrating conservation collections efforts with important field research. An excellent result of this collaborative botanical work is on page 4 – a new species discovered! Page 5 shows how a classic science is finding new focus at Montgomery.

I am thrilled about our work with Coral Gables Museum (pages 6 and 7). Some say Montgomery is better known internationally than here in Miami. By working with the Museum, our work now reaches our great local community. Montgomery also had nationwide exposure this past November, when the PBS show *Ask this Old House* featured Montgomery plants and staff in a segment on palm horticulture.

Our Team – the great people at Montgomery who exemplify cooperation and camaraderie – accomplishes so much only through your generosity. 2012 saw increased breadth and amount of support (pages 9 and 10). I highlight one example – thanks to the Sacher family, Montgomery was able to restore the original Greenhouse which was vital to Montgomery's mission (page 11). More great news is developing right now – next issue will share the completion of our upgraded nursery!

Twelve pages can only show a portion of our work. So, please see our website for all the other great news. Or, please write, call or visit – I look forward to seeing you!

Pictured: Dr. Griffith with *Sabal* × *brazoriensis* in Brazoria County, Texas (See story on facing page).

The Botanical Dream Team: Brett Jestrow, Chad Husby, Teodoro Clase, & Jason Lopez

Over the last year, botanists from Montgomery worked to bring new *Sabal* species into cultivation. Montgomery has a leading living collection of *Sabal*, an important resource for research and conservation. Including our beloved native *S. palmetto* and the elusive *S. miamiensis*, the genus has up to 16 species, and 14 of these are grown at Montgomery – including two Florida State Champions, *S. uresana* and *S. yapa*.

A Giant Dominican Palmetto

For recent plant exploration fieldwork in the Dominican Republic, Dr. Chad Husby of Montgomery teamed up with Dr. Brett Jestrow and Jason Lopez of Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden (FTBG) at the invitation of Ricardo Garcia, Director General of Jardín Botánico Nacional Dr. Rafael Ma. Moscoso de Santo Domingo (JBSD). Francisco Jiménez Rodríguez and Alberto Veloz of the JBSD coordinated the visit. Expert botanist Teodoro Clase of JBSD accompanied the team in the field. The project built upon longstanding collaboration among the three botanic gardens. Dr. Lin Lougheed generously provided funding for this field project.

The team focused on palms and other ornamentally and scientifically important plants to introduce to the botanical collections of South Florida. Over 100 species were collected, including *Reinhardtia paiewonskiana*, from the Sierra de Bahoruco. It is the only *Reinhardtia* palm species in the Caribbean and a new genus for MBC and FTBG. Two mountain conifers were also collected, *Podocarpus aristulatus* and *Juniperus ekmanii*.

The team's main goal was to evaluate and collect *Sabal domingensis*, perhaps the largest *Sabal* species, from along the northern Caribbean coast. For many years, a large planting of Dominican sabals at Montgomery were considered *S. domingensis*, but Palm Biologist Larry Noblick recently determined these were misidentified *S. causiarum*.

The team found a large *S. domingensis* population scattered along hillsides and pastures in a dry forest along the north coast. Because of an unusually dry summer most of the palms had no seed. After much searching, mature fruits were found on a robust specimen (see cover).

The JBSD collections were also enriched from the collaboration, with plants from Montgomery, specimens from FTBG, and new material from the fieldwork. The remarkable plants and the extensive collaborations hearken back to the early botanical collaboration in South Florida. Colonel Robert Montgomery, Dr. David Fairchild, and Dr. Rafael Ma. Moscoso would undoubtedly have been very pleased with the outcome.

The Newest Palmetto

Recently, Dr. Doug Goldman of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) discovered that the tall palms in Brazoria County, Texas were actually a new hybrid species, *Sabal* × *brazoriensis* (see the Spring 2012 Newsletter). Since this *Sabal* was not yet in our collection, bringing this new palmetto to Montgomery was an important goal! Dr. Patrick Griffith teamed up with Doug, Mr. Thomas Adams of the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and Colonel Michael Griffith (Patrick's Dad) to study and collect specimens of this unique palm.

Perhaps only a few hundred Brazoria Palms survive in the wild (see photo on page 2). Fortunately, they thrive in a forest which was recently protected as part of the San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge. The team collected seeds, specimens and photographs, to help conserve and document this very rare natural hybrid species.

Patrick is grateful to Doug and Thomas for their time, knowledge and expertise, the Paul Drummond Fund for Palm Conservation for funding this fieldwork, the USFWS for permission to collect and to Mike and Sylvia Griffith for hospitality and support.

New Cycad Discovery in Colombia

An exciting cycad discovery to report: A new *Zamia* from the Eastern Cordillera Mountain Range of Huila, Colombia. The new species was recently described by Montgomery cycad biologist Michael Calonje along with colleagues (see citation below) from the TOLI herbarium, Jardín Botánico José Celestino Mutis, Universidad Surcolombiana, and the New York Botanical Garden

Before this fieldwork, only three specimens had been collected and these collections occurred prior to 1945! Records on this species were scarce. Very little was known about its appearance, its habitat, the extent of its distribution, or its conservation status. In fact, it was unclear whether or not the species went extinct!

Supported by a grant from the Association of Zoological Horticulture, the botanists set out to scout the Eastern Cordillera of Huila near the area where the species had last been collected almost 70 years ago. This region is now largely deforested. Fortunately, small remnants of forest near steep ravines and rivers had been spared, and there the team found healthy, reproductive populations.

Detailed study in the field verified that the mysterious cycad was indeed a distinct species, and it was named *Zamia huilensis* to honor its native department of Huila.

Zamia huilensis has similar reproductive structures to *Zamia tolimensis* from neighboring Tolima (see Spring 2012 Newsletter), but leaflets that are more similar to *Zamia muricata* from the Eastern plains of Colombia. It is much smaller than the gigantic *Zamia tolimensis* and differs in leaflet shape, whereas it differs from *Z. muricata* in its habit (arborescent vs. subterranean) and the shape and color of its cones.

Zamia huilensis is the fourth new species of *Zamia* described in Colombia in as many years, indicating that Colombia's highly diverse flora still holds surprises!

Citation: Calonje, M., H. E. Esquivel, G. Morales, Y. A. Mora-Lizcano, and D. Stevenson. 2012. A new arborescent species of *Zamia* (Cycadales, Zamiaceae) from the Department of Huila, Eastern Cordillera of Colombia. Caldasia 34:283-290.

Above: Hector Esquivel, Michael Calonje and Gustavo Morales with *Zamia huilensis*

Zamia huilensis survives in fragmented forest habitats, where most habitat has been cleared for pasture and agriculture. The seeds of this new species are bright orange when mature, whereas most *Zamia* seeds are red at maturity.

An Anatomist's Garden

Special Skills Meet Prized Plants

Barry Tomlinson sectioning cycads

Behold the Research Renaissance in structural biology! A growing focus on the classic field of plant anatomy is emerging at Montgomery. Recently, we have seen palm anatomists from Switzerland (Fred Stauffer) and Peru (Carlos Martel) cycad anatomists from Mexico (Andrew Vovides) and New York (Dennis Stevenson), and students from Canada (Natalie Prior and Julia Gill), traveling here to work with our team and dissect our collections.

Undergraduate Intern Nicolas Espinosa (FIU) has worked with Brett Jestrow (FTBG) to examine Montgomery's *Zamia* collections for epidermal patterns. Montgomery Volunteer Lan Nghiem-Phu has worked to equip the team with internet-linked microscopy. And, our own cycad biologist Michael Calonje recently returned from a training visit to Andrew Vovides' lab in Xalapa, where he learned sectioning and histology for his *Zamia* research.

This spring, Montgomery hosts Suelen Alves Vianna, a Ph.D. student from Universidade Estadual de Campinas, Brazil, to section and evaluate *Acrocomia* palms. Suelen is sectioning our palms here at the Tyson Building, and in the laboratories of the Robbins Building, which served as the research department for FTBG for many years. Suelen is joined by our Palm Biologist, Larry Noblick, who is working to survey leaflet anatomy in the stemless *Syagrus*.

I am proud to announce that all these wonderful structure scholars are now joined by a master of the microtome – Barry Tomlinson – who has spent the winter at Montgomery studying leaf anatomy in cycads.

All of this anatomy work at Montgomery is made possible through broad and generous support for facilities, equipment, research fellowships, and materials (see page 10). I highlight here the recently-dedicated Chris Tyson Plant Conservation Building, where these studies take place, and the Kelly Foundation, which has brought so many experts to Montgomery.

It is a natural match – living research plants, grown in a common garden, easily accessible to basic lab space – Montgomery seems designed for plant anatomy.

Dr. Patrick Griffith, Executive Director
patrick@montgomerybotanical.org

Suelen Alves Vianna and Larry Noblick with an *Acrocomia* leaf in the Chris Tyson Plant Conservation Building

Montgomery was invited by the Coral Gables Museum to develop an exhibition on plant exploration and the history of plant collecting. Patrick Griffith and Tracy Magellan compiled historic photos, plants, and traditional tools of the trade. The display at the Coral Gables Museum was shown from January 4 - February 24, 2013.

Along with the exhibition, Montgomery Botanical Center participated in tours, gallery nights, family day programs and lectures. Patrick Griffith and Larry Noblick gave lectures on plant collecting, "Plant Exploration" and "From the Jungle to the Garden."

This exhibit allowed Montgomery to reach a much broader audience by partnering with the Coral Gables Museum to educate the community about work in plant science. The exciting work of botanists is often not known to the broader public, and the downtown venue offered by the Coral Gables Museum made these fascinating stories available to all.

"Working with Christine Rupp and Caroline Parker of the Coral Gables Museum is great – they are real experts in reaching our community through programs and events. And I especially thank JPMorgan Chase and Company, who generously sponsored this science education exhibit," states Patrick. Montgomery's cultural programming is also supported by the City of Coral Gables and Miami-Dade County.


Learning the tools

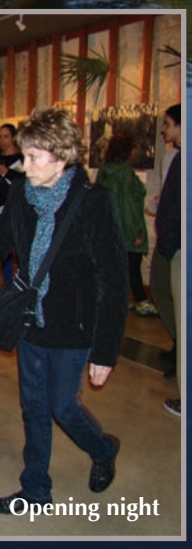

The story of Robert and Nell Montgomery


Hidden Palms Bike Tour

Family Day seed activity

of the botany trade

Larry Noblick with
Attalea, 1986



Opening night

Plant Exploration

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Notes & Updates

- **Alan Meerow** of the USDA published a detailed study of Puerto Rican cycads, with colleagues from Montgomery, The New York Botanical Garden (NYBG), and FIU. The study, appearing in the *American Journal of Botany* (Volume 99, Issue 11), used extensive genetic data to examine the natural history of these rare Caribbean zamias. The work was funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF), a Christiane Tyson Research Fellowship, and the participating institutions.

- Also funded by the NSF, Montgomery hosted a Cycad Biology Workshop for Miami-Dade County Public School Teachers. Eleven teachers from high schools and middle schools attended and learned from lectures, dissections, and review of the living collections. The workshop was taught by **Dennis Stevenson, Javier Francisco-Ortega, Michael Calonje**, and **Patrick Griffith**.

- The eagerly anticipated *Proceedings of the 8th International Conference on Cycad Biology* appeared in print recently, and included six chapters which used the Montgomery collections, were written by Montgomery staff, or both. This broad compilation of current cycad research from around the world was published by NYBG.

- Montgomery hosted the 2nd meeting of the *Network for Neotropical Biogeography* (NNTBG) in January. The meeting brought together over 60 experts from around the world who work with tropical plants and other organisms in the New World. The NNTBG works to promote coordination and interaction among scientists working in the tropics.

- **James Clugston**, a student from Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh and Kelly Research Fellow at Montgomery, produced several short films about Montgomery, highlighting plants and science. The films can be seen on Montgomery's YouTube channel, *Montgomery TV*. In the image here, **Larry Noblick** relates his experiences in palm collecting.

Dr. Larry Noblick on Montgomery TV

For more updates, please see our website: www.montgomerybotanical.org

Rethinking Raised Beds

Given the flat aspect of South Florida terrain, berms and raised beds are almost ubiquitous in the landscape, for aesthetics, functionality or both. In theory the raised bed offers better drainage.

At Montgomery we have experimented with raised beds, especially for the more finicky collections, with mixed results. For example, an experimental *Macrozamia* bed, incorporating state of the art lateral and vertical drainage structures with a custom blended substrate did not perform as expected, while a few of the *Cycas* beds, constructed in a much more primitive fashion, using locally available soils with no drainage augmentation, have shown remarkable success. It should also be noted that many of the cycads Colonel Montgomery planted at grade in 1932 are thriving today, after more than eight decades in native soils.

Our observations here lead us to conclude that raised beds are not a panacea for drainage. In permanent plantings, there is the hazard of the "perched water table," whereby over the years the fines in the substrate settle and form an impermeable barrier. This leads to root rot and the demise of the plants.

To address the problem, the team is working to lower the most problematic raised beds back down to original grade. It is labor-intensive, for sure, but hopefully will have positive results for the collections well into the future.


Lee with a *Cycas bougainvilleana*, collected in Papua New Guinea in 1936, and planted by Colonel Montgomery in native soil

Lee Anderson, Superintendent
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Thank You to Our 2012 Volunteers

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We also thank our directors (listed on page 2) who volunteer their time, talents and efforts.

Team News

Vickie Murphy, Nursery Curator, completed her Master of Science in Environmental Horticulture from the University of Florida. Vickie studied how various soil types effect the growth of *Zamia* seedlings. This work not only broke new scholarly ground, but it also applies directly here! Vickie also won an award for best presentation for this project.

Judy Kay, Montgomery's first Seedbank Coordinator, has retired after nearly 15 years of dedicated service. Thankfully, Judy's unique expertise will not be lost, as right away she has started in her new role as Seedbank Volunteer! **Claudia Calonje** has been promoted to Seedbank Coordinator, and will carry the program forward.

Montgomery welcomes two new Fellows in Conservation Horticulture: **Meylin Aoun** and **Michael Tsairis,** students at Miami-Dade College, began this February. The students will gain diverse experience at Montgomery, through this program funded by the Elizabeth Ordway Dunn Foundation. **Xavier Gratacos,** the recent Fellow, is now hired as Assistant Curator.

Patrick Griffith received the *Chuck Rogers Conservation Award* from the Association of Zoological Horticulture (AZH), for lifetime achievement in plant conservation. The AZH advances horticulture and its role in the living natural history museum.

Congratulations to Vickie!

Would you like to volunteer?
To volunteer to help at Montgomery contact Tracy.
(305)667-3800 ext. 114
tracym@montgomerybotanical.org

Montgomery Botanical Center 2012 Collection Inventory

	Palms	Cycads	Other
Total Taxa	520	328	749
in ground	365	234	552
in nursery	155	94	197
Total Accessions	2,467	2,155	2,449
in ground	1,992	1,697	2,168
in nursery	475	458	281
Total Plants	12,217	9,663	4,102
in ground	6,064	4,506	2,568
in nursery	6,153	5,157	1,534

Montgomery Botanical Center
Gratefully Acknowledges Your 2012 Support

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Montgomery apologizes for any omissions or errors in accuracy

Two Anniversaries

The Sachers and the Greenhouse

The Montgomery Board, members, and supporters gathered on the evening of November 1, 2012 to honor the family of Charles and Dorothy Sacher, who generously funded the restoration of the 1932 Montgomery Greenhouse.

The original greenhouse was built by Colonel Montgomery in 1932 (see back cover), the same year he established his plant collection and home. Over the last 80 years, the greenhouse has continuously served the Montgomery mission — almost every plant in the collection started out as a seedling in that greenhouse.

Careful assessment by a preservation architect, provided by the Conservation Assessment Program, determined that critical repairs were needed to ensure the 1932 structure could continue its important service. Charles and Dorothy's sons and daughters-in-law — Charles S. and Ana Sacher, Richard and Annamaria Sacher, and John and Ana Sacher — provided the full support needed for this important work, in honor of Charles and Dorothy's 50th wedding anniversary.

We greatly appreciate the leadership shown by Charles S. Sacher, his brothers, and their wives in providing this critical funding. Please join us in thanking the Sacher family, and congratulating Charles and Dorothy on their golden anniversary!

Patrick Griffith with Ana, Charles S., Dorothy, Charles P., Richard, & Annamaria Sacher at the grand reopening of the 1932 Greenhouse

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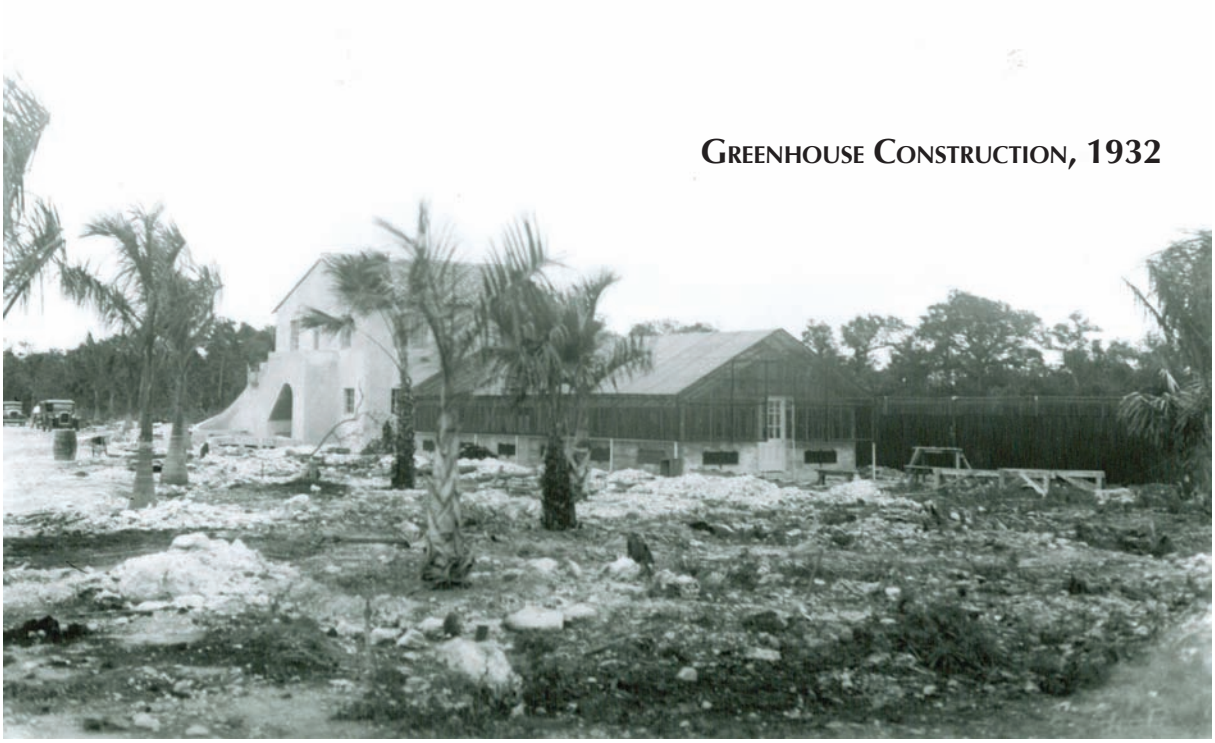

Greenhouse Construction, 1932

Colonel Robert Montgomery knew from his experience that a botanic garden requires sufficient investment in facilities to operate effectively. Thus, in his very first year, Montgomery built what was needed to propagate and care for his plant collection. This photo shows his original 1932 Greenhouse, Gatehouse and some of his first plant collections.

Montgomery has been working to restore and update our collections care infrastructure. The greenhouse pictured here was recently restored (see page 11), thanks to a gift from the Sacher family. We would also like to thank the Kelly Foundation, the Batchelor Foundation, the Stanley Smith Horticultural Trust, the National Sciece Foundation, the Helen C. Frick Foundation and the Boy Scouts of America Troop 457 for supporting the nursery upgrade project. An update on the nursery upgrade project will be featured in the next issue of Montgomery Botanical News.