

New finding of species endemic of palm in Colombia



A new wild population of the wax palm of Sasaima, *Ceroxylon sasaimae*, was found in rural area of San Luis, Antioch, during one of the expeditions that the **project** realizes “**Collection of Palms of Colombia**” of the **Botanical Garden of the Quindío**, initiative funded by the Alexander von Humboldt Institute in its persistence to promote the investigation and conservation of the biodiversity of the country.

The *Ceroxylon sasaimae* is one of the threatened endemic species more of the country, which they were only known near 100 adult palms in the region of San Francisco and Sasaima, near Bogota.

The discovery motivated an expedition by two relicts from forest to the outskirts of the municipality of San Luis, that counted on the technical support of Gloria Galeano and Rodrigo Bernal of the Institute of Natural Sciences of the National University of Colombia, civil servants of the Botanical Garden of the Quindío, the Regional Independent Corporation of the River basins of the Rivers Negro and Nare - Cornare-, the Regional Corporation Independent of the Center of Antioch - Corantioquia-, the municipal administration and diverse environmental organizations of the region.

According to Vernal, “the finding of the *Ceroxylon sasaimae* in this region is important because it gives the possibility us of rescuing a species that is a danger of extinction from the commitment of environmental authorities like Cornare, the same municipality of San Luis and the environmental groups of the zone, to protect and to conserve this palm”.

The inhabitants of San Luis received the fact with rejoicing, while the sectional one of Cornare summoned to one nourished meeting with the tour guides and environmental organizations of the municipality, with the purpose of to jeopardize them with the care of the appraised species, by means of participating monitoring and research programs.

In the place where they were the *Ceroxylon sasaimae* could be collected samples of other 13 different species from palms, which indicates the good state of the forest, as Gloria Galeano explains, “Las Palmas are important for the biodiversity because they have an important role in the health of the ecosystems, when there are palms in a place, means that there are fruits for the wild fauna (birds, mammals), it lodges for the animal, it is generated biomass, (...) The palms are important elements for the ecosystems”.

The “premium” of the national tree

Colombia, with 235 species and 44 sorts, is the richest country of America in palms and the second in the world, after Malaysia.

The wax palm of Sasaima is part of the *Ceroxylon* sort, the same of the wax palm of the Quindío, the national tree, and they are characterized by his height, carries, the age that gets to have (more than 100 years) and the possibility of adapting to different thermal floors.

The palms *Ceroxylon* understands 12 endemic species of the andes, distributed from Venezuela to Bolivia. They are important

because they serve as food for different birds and mammals and in many cases is their place of nesting. They are species with a high degree of vulnerability because in many places they are used to make candles, to put a roof on houses, to make posts and in some cases the fruits are consumed by the man, although the main factor of danger is the use that occurs to its leaves in different religious festivals and the accelerated loss of its habitat: the Andean forests.

These palms receive their name because the stem and underside of the leaves are white and remain wax places setting. Their fruits are of globosa form and they hang generally in cluster from the low part of the leaves.

A place for the conservation

The project "Collection of Palms of Colombia", that develops the Botanical Garden of the Quindío from the Nineties, looks for to preserve a sample of all the species of native palms in Colombia, like a strategy of conservation outside its natural habitats with the intention of maintaining the survival of the species in its natural means.

With time one has consolidated like one of the collections of more important palms of the world, with more than 148 native species and its heap grows every day thanks to the botanical expeditions that realizes all over the national territory.

From that palms collected by the project take samples for the weave bank of the Humboldt Institute, a biological collection that it looks for to conserve individuals, or parts of these, to have a genetic and evolutionary perspective of the Colombian biodiversity.

In the headquarters of the bank, located in Palmira, the Valley of the Cauca, is lodged more than 11,000 weave samples, that represent the DNA of an ample rank of the species of the country. This is without a doubt, part of the genetic memory of the Nation.