THE INTERNATIONAL PALM SOCIETY
Conserve. Learn. Grow.

Mar. 2025 NEWSLETTER

New Board Member and Palm Sunday

New Board Member: Juliano Borin

Our new member of the board of the International Palm Society is an agronomist, the co-founder of the Brazilian Palm Society (Sociedade Brasileira de Palmeiras, or SBP), and the botanical curator at Inhotim, the renowned art museum and botanical garden in Brunhadino, Minas Gerais, Brazil. Inhotim is the largest open-air museum in Latin America, with 24 galleries located among botanical collections on a parcel of land spanning Atlantic Forest (Mata Atlântica) and Cerrado biomes. The collection has 4,300 species of plants, including 500 species of palms.

IPS Board member Juliano Borin holds an infructescence of an *Attalea* species in Brazil.

Inhotim interweaves art, gardens, and environmental sustainability across 5,000 acres (2,023 hectares).

Juliano was born in Recife, Pernambuco, in northeast Brazil, but lived after age six in the countryside near São Jose dos Campos outside São Paulo. He studied agronomy at the Universidade Federal Rural do Rio de Janeiro (UFRRJ), obtained his master's degree in forestry at Bangor University, Wales, UK, and is working toward a Ph.D. in garden design at São Paulo University (USP).

The interview that follows has been edited for publication.

How did you first become interested in palms?
I have always been deeply interested in plants, particularly trees, forests, medicinal, and ornamental plants. Since childhood, I have enjoyed being surrounded by nature. My grandparents had a large piece of land where they cultivated medicinal and ornamental plants. My grandmother would prepare 'magical potions' that cured our ailments. This intrigued me, and I would often ask about the legends and folk beliefs surrounding the use of herbs.

My grandfather, who had been an amateur hunter in his youth, would recount his adventures in the forest, tracking jaguars and other animals. He was a remarkable storyteller, and I was captivated by his tales set in an environment filled with towering trees.

At the age of 13, I ventured into the dense Atlantic Forest (Mata Atlântica) for the first time with my cousin, who cut down a *Euterpe edulis*, from which we ate the heart of palm. I still vividly remember its exquisite taste—an unforgettable, almost magical experience.

Juliano Borin pictured with the fruits of *Mauritia carana*, one of two species of *Mauritia*.

At Universidade Federal Rural do Rio de Janeiro (UFRRJ), I was introduced to agroecology and agroforestry, where various plant species are cultivated simultaneously, mimicking the natural dynamics of a forest.

Through this, I began to understand the crucial role of palm trees within these systems.

During my university years, I collected *Elaeis guineensis* fruits to produce palm oil, which I sold to help cover my expenses.

I had the opportunity to work in botanical gardens, starting with The Eden Project in England and later at Inhotim, which holds one of the largest palm collections in Brazil. These experiences deepened my understanding of the immense importance of palm trees for tropical peoples. They are fundamental to their cultures, serving as food sources and materials for tools, housing, and construction.

Today, I dedicate a significant portion of my time to the in-depth study of palm trees, and my Ph.D. research focuses on their use in landscape design.

What is your current professional role, and how does it relate to palms?
For the past 13 years, I have been collecting wild palm species across Brazil, while also serving as a botanical curator at Inhotim, where I work to expand its palm collection. Brazil is incredibly rich in palm species—so much so that indigenous peoples once referred to this land as 'Pindorama,' the land of palm trees.

Have you worked professionally in the past with palms?
I deeply enjoy observing palms and the wildlife that interacts with them, including birds, rodents, and various mammals. At the botanical garden where I work, we have over 19,000 planted palm trees, creating a breathtaking spectacle and enhancing the tropical essence of the landscape. I, too, am among the animals that relish palm fruits, frequently consuming *butiá*, *açaí*, and *juçara*, as well as heart of palm whenever possible.

How can the International Palm Society contribute to research, conservation, and education in your country and your region?
The IPS, together with SBP, can play a crucial role in raising public awareness about the significance of these magnificent plants, which are so vital to both wildlife and human well-being. As a botanical garden professional and Vice President of the Brazilian Network of Botanical

Gardens, I have already helped launch a project to distribute diverse palm species across Brazilian botanical gardens. Additionally, we are currently working on the creation of a palmetum at the University of São Paulo.

What are one or two ways that the IPS can uphold and strengthen its international role? My intention with IPS is to enhance genetic exchange between collectors and botanical gardens while also encouraging the collection of wild material to broaden the genetic base of both public and private collections.

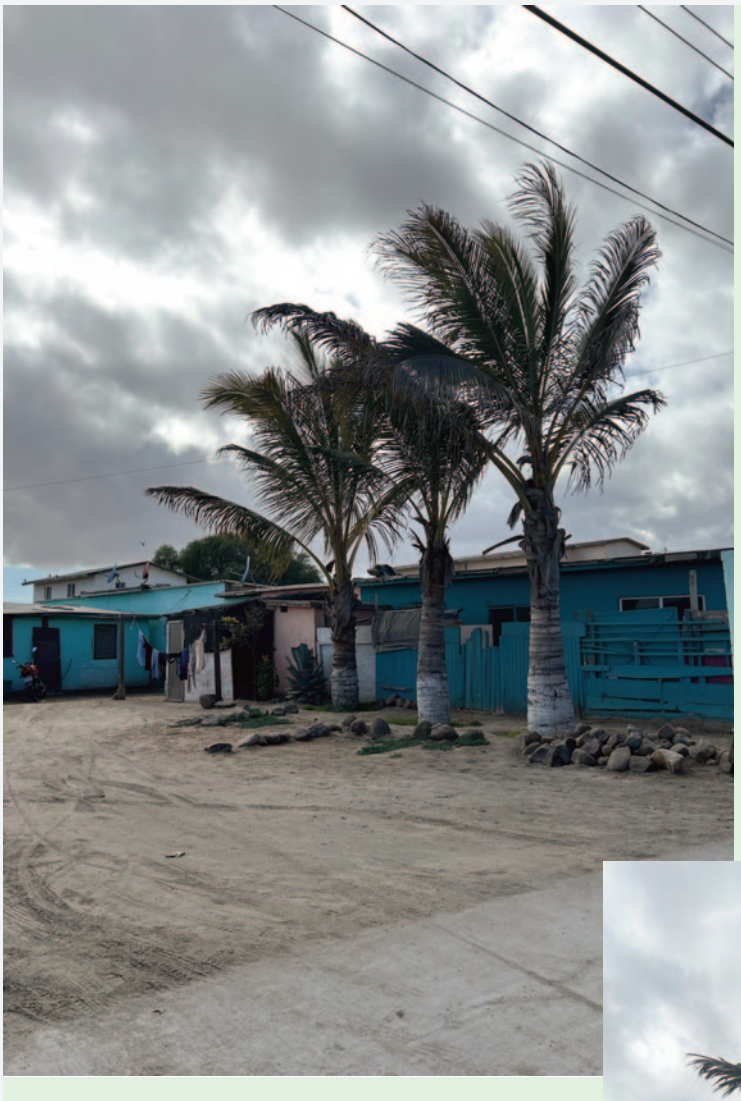
I would like to extend a warm invitation to my fellow members of IPS to join us for the Third SBP (*Sociedade Brasileira de Palmeiras* / Brazilian Palm Society) Symposium, which will take place on September 24 to 26, 2025, in Ilhéus/Itacaré, Bahia, Brazil.

Poleward Coconuts in Baja California

How far north do coconuts grow? We've received a report from the west coast of North America: Kyle Wicomb visited Baja California in January and found coconut palms (*Cocos nucifera*) growing at Guerrero Negro, just south of the 28th parallel north, on the Pacific Coast, and at San Felipe, at the 31st parallel north, on the coast of the Sea of Cortez / Gulf of California.

The climate of the Pacific side of Baja is cooler and humid thanks to the chilly waters of the ocean and marine-layer clouds there, while that of San Felipe is more extreme, with very hot, somewhat humid summers (thanks to seasonally warm Gulf waters), and sunny, cool, dry winters. Like most of Baja California, both towns are in quite-dry deserts, so these trees are most likely given ample irrigation to survive in the absence of reliable rainfall.

Kyle photographed coconuts at San Felipe, Baja California, Mexico, with a smattering of bloom on *Delonix regia* in the foreground.



Cloudy skies and blue paint form a backdrop to three coconut palms at Guerrero Negro, Baja California Sur, Mexico, near the lagoons where Gray Whales (*Eschrichtius robustus*) breed and calve in winter. Many other marine mammals and four sea turtle species also inhabit the lagoons there.

A coconut frames a bright-orange house in Guerrero Negro. The nearby Ojo de Liebre Lagoon (also known as Scammon's Lagoon) supplies the largest commercial saltworks plant in the world.

Visitors to resorts around Cabo San Lucas in southernmost Baja California, south of the Tropic of Cancer, enjoy the sight of many coconut palms, but these scrappy individuals that Kyle saw may be among the northernmost on the peninsula. West of San Felipe, in canyons of the Sierra San Pedro Martír, grow populations of *Brahea armata*, the Mexican blue palm, indigenous to Baja.

Brahea armata pictured in habitat near Misión Santa Maria, Baja California.

Report from Tropical Macaronesia: Cape Verde

From Belgium, Andreas Becker writes:

Last year in October I spent a week on the island of Sal, Cape Verde. I've seen quite a lot of coconut palms there. Other types of more or less tropical palms I've seen were *Latania loddigesii* or a related genus, *Pritchardia* spp., *Bismarckia nobilis*, *Adonidia merrillii*, *Ptychosperma elegans* and also *Roystonea regia*.
The pictures of *Cocos nucifera* were taken in the town called Santa Maria.

The Cape Verde Islands (the country of Cabo Verde), is home to the endangered *Phoenix atlantica*. Read about it in PALMS 47(1): 5–14, published in 2003 and available in the archive on Palms.org.

From PALMS, a phoenix specimen in Ribeira São Martinho Grande, Santiago, Cape Verde. *Phoenix atlantica* and *P. dactylifera* can be distinguished in the field by details of the flowers and fruit. Santiago is the largest island of the archipelago and location of the country's capital city, Praia.

Palm Sunday

In Christian traditions, palm leaves are blessed and shared with congregants on the Sunday before Easter, Palm Sunday. This year it takes place on April 13. The date changes each year in relation to the appearance of the first full moon after the spring equinox.

Pietro Lorenzetti painted a fresco (circa 1320, CE) in Assisi, Italy, showing the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem over a bed of palm fronds. A bearded man in orange presents a palm frond while a lady in pink lays down a cloak on the path.

At the start of the first millennium of the Common Era, people in the Levant had a custom of covering the path of an honored person, a sort of red carpet. Upon Jesus's triumphal return to Jerusalem several days before his crucifixion, a crowd welcomed him with displays of palm fronds, according to the four canonical Gospels of the New Testament of the Bible, laying down those fronds, branches of other plants, and their cloaks to cover his path. Date palms, *Phoenix dactylifera*, would have been the likely source of these leaves. Palm fronds carried an association with eternal life from Ancient Egypt, and with triumph and the end of war, *i.e.*, peace, in Roman culture. In Christian iconography, the palm frond signifies righteousness and the triumph of spirit over the flesh, in keeping with its ancient symbolism of eternal life. Where palm leaves are unavailable, the foliage of olives, willows, yews, and other plants take on their role.

Congregants in many churches take home the palm fronds handed out on Palm Sunday and decorate an honored spot in their home with them or weave them into crosses and other crafts. The following year, churches collect the now-dry foliage and burn it to make ash that in turn is blessed and used in the Ash Wednesday ceremony that precedes Palm Sunday by 33 days.

Palm Imagery Circa 1300

Palm forms show up when you least expect them. In January your San Francisco-based editor visited the Metropolitan Museum of Art in freezing New York to see Siena: The Rise of Painting, 1300–1350, a show of art from the dawn of the Italian Renaissance. It included work by Pietro Lorenzetti, whose fresco at Assisi illustrated in the prior section shows Jesus's entry into Jerusalem.

To illustrate the trade networks passing through Siena and their influence on Italian art, the Met curators included this silk and gold-thread textile made in Central Asia in the 13th or 14th century comprising a stylized pattern of palm leaves. It was part of vestments worn in the basilica of San Francesco at Assisi. According to the curators, "Weavers in Lucca and Venice responded to the demand for such silks by producing their own versions of these patterns." What did palms mean to the people who made this fine work?

Chapter News

We will continue to share news from chapters affiliated with the International Palm Society around the world. Please send your news to editor Jason Dewees at loulu.fan@gmail.com / loulufan@gmail.com. Meeting recaps, garden visits, bushwalks, upcoming sales events and meetings—please send links, photos, and reports about them to your editor.

The IPS Board is making an effort to strengthen and renew ties to local chapters. Your submissions about local activities help keep the palm world connected.

Palm Savanna on YouTube

Finally, a recommendation for watching extraordinary video footage of palms, particularly in habitat: Youtube.com/@palmsavanna

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