

## The Texas and Tết Edition

### Texas IPS Weekend and Vietnam Biennial, Part 1 2026 Biennial Tour Kicks Off in Hanoi, Vietnam

The 2026 Palm Society Biennial tour and board meeting took place in Hanoi at the end of the Tết holiday marking Vietnamese new year. The Biennial is the Society's greatest event of "palmaraderie"—palm-related camaraderie—and a major part of participants' excitement is visiting new palmy places around the globe.



Hanoi's 1500-year-old Tran Quoc Pagoda is on an island near the center of Vietnam's capital city with betel nut palms (*Areca catechu*) and coconuts (*Cocos nucifera*).

The One Pillar Pagoda Temple



Temples and historic sites in the Vietnamese capital were bedecked with flowers and offerings and full of worshippers and tourists—some dressed in traditional garb for the occasion—celebrating the Year of the Horse.

Temple of Literature



Many Biennial participants stayed at the Sofitel Metropole Hotel, planted with numerous royal palms (*Roystonea regia*) and Chinese fan palms (*Livistona chinensis*). Right: The city accommodates palms in its dense, narrow streets as well as in its ample parks.

Next to Uncle HỒ<sup>1</sup> Fish Pond is Ho Chi Minh's Stilt House, where Vietnam's first president and prime minister (nicknamed Uncle Ho) lived for most of his time as the leader of the country. It is preserved as a relic with his furniture and artifacts inside.



Coconuts and royal palms grow at Uncle Ho's Fish Pond.

The park and arboretum surrounding the pond features *Livistona chinensis*, *Cocos nucifera*, *Caryota mitis*, royal palms, *Phoenix roebelenii*, and woody trees like mahogany (*Swietenia macrophylla*) and bald cypress (*Taxodium distichum*) mounted with epiphytic orchids like *Cymbidium* and *Vanda*.

The most widely planted palms of Hanoi also include betel nut and the worldwide favorite, the golden-cane palm (*Chrysalidocarpus lutescens*).

Look for our next installment on the Biennial tour in next month's newsletter.



## Rio Grande Valley Palm Weekend by IPS

The first in a new program of weekend trips sponsored by the International Palm Society took place at South Padre Island and Brownsville, Texas, USA, from Friday, December 12 to Sunday, December 14. We're calling these shorter trips "Palm Weekend by IPS" (formerly known as the "weekend biennial").



Two members of the Palm Society of South Texas, Georgina Putegnath (left) and Nancy Escobedo, delve into one of the delicious dishes that make South Texas cooking famous

The Palm Society of South Texas gave a warm welcome to International Palm Society travelers from around North America. The Margaritaville Beach Resort on South Padre was home base for out-of-town visitors and the site of the welcome dinner featuring delicious local shrimp. Slide talks followed, the first by your editor on designing gardens with palms, based on my book, *Designing with Palms*; the second by Andrew Street, Curator of Palms at the Montgomery Botanical Center, on the palms of Miami; and the third by IPS Palm Hero, Elvis Cruz, on the status of the Morningside Park Palmetum, Miami.

The weekend's outdoor activities began on Saturday morning with a visit to wetlands, both freshwater and saltwater, on South Padre Island, where we saw birds, mangroves, alligators, and the local native Texas palmetto, *Sabal mexicana*.



Roseate spoonbills and black-bellied whistling ducks around the South Padre Island Birding and Nature Center.



Texas palmetto at the Gladys Porter Zoo in Brownsville, where the Palm Society of South Texas has contributed to major palm installations—and where we feasted on barbecue during a joint meeting of the IPS and the PSST.



IPS Board member, Dr. Romeo Montalvo, and his wife, Linda, opened their beautiful home garden for a cocktail party. Among the remarkable palms sighted in their collection was a trunking *Medemia argun*.

George Bailey (South Florida), Brian Grove (Dallas), and Cindy Adair (Puerto Rico) explore the expansive garden of the Montalvos' neighbor, Dr. Roberto Robles and his wife, Perla.





The 1892 Rabb House is the visitor center for the Sabal Palm Sanctuary in the southern extremity of Texas on the Rio Grande.

The Palm Weekend's grand finale was our visit to the Sabal Palm Sanctuary, the last remnant of what used to be a vast forest of *Sabal mexicana*. Over a buffet lunch of local cuisine we were treated to a presentation by the movers and shakers of the Gorgas Science Foundation, stewards of the Sanctuary, on the history and natural science of the Rio Grande Valley—the delta of the river. It was a fascinating expansion on Saturday's lunch-time presentation. Then, we explored the trails among these majestic palms in their only natural population north of the border, glimpsing Mexico on the far bank of the narrow Rio Grande.

*Sabal* palms viewed from the veranda of the Rabb House



## The Enduring Palm: *Sabal mexicana* as the Proposed State Palm of Texas

By Logan Dovalina, Palm Society of South Texas

Living in the Rio Grande Valley, palms are naturally in my lexicon, both visually and auditorily. I hear the percussion of their leaves colliding in the wind or witness the tenacity of a single palm growing out of a sidewalk crevice. They're everywhere and elegantly so. The Rio Grande Valley has had a storied relationship with palms.



Sabal palm forest was the dominant vegetation in the Rio Grande Valley before modern agricultural development. The Sabal Palm Sanctuary preserves the remnants of the forest.

For over a century, Frank Rabb, George Pletcher, and, currently, the Palm Society of South Texas have advocated for their protection and symbolism. Historically, palms defined our landscape. Thousands of palms lined Valley highways and framed the edges of resacas, our natural oxbow lakes from the Rio Grande, symbolizing the area. Palmview, Texas, earned its name from that once-endless horizon of palms that crowned our then-agricultural empire, now urbanized and unremembered.

For most of my life, I have been a witness. Growing up amid the Tamaulipan thornscrub, I was surrounded by the wild symphony of chachalacas, green jays, and the mystique of the elusive ocelot. Being at the Sabal Palm Sanctuary felt like stepping into another world, ancient, lush, and otherworldly. It was magical and rightly so. In my early twenties, I chose to become one of that world, becoming a Texas Master Naturalist and a Texas Master Gardener, while joining the Palm Society of South Texas, the Native Plant Society, the Native Plant Project, and the International Palm Society

At the same time, I immersed myself in historic preservation, writing state historic markers, interning with the Texas Historical Commission, and authoring the National Register of Historic Places nomination for my neighborhood, Shary Heights. Quiet advocacy for the Valley's cultural and environmental heritage became a calling. I crave it, truthfully.

That is why I noticed something missing: Texas has no state palm. Our symbols are wonderfully diverse, including the monarch butterfly as the state insect (2015), the pecan (*Carya illinoensis*) as the state tree (1919), and the state native shrub as the Texas purple sage (*Leucophyllum frutescens*, 2005). Even the state stone is petrified palmwood. Yet, no palm is in our state's iconography. South Carolina and Florida both honor *Sabal palmetto* as their state tree, so why shouldn't Texas recognize its own native palm?

And the appropriate choice is clear: *Sabal mexicana*. While the *Washingtonia robusta* is prolific, the *Sabal mexicana* is the only native palm in the Rio Grande Valley, with only thirty-one acres remaining over the vast sixty thousand once recorded. The Sabal Palm Sanctuary, stewarded by the Gorgas Science Foundation in partnership with the National Audubon Society, preserves the last wild grove of this species in the United States. Botanists, professors like Lawrence Lof, and countless private citizens recognize its enduring significance. So, it's time that our state do so too. It's time to champion it again.



The Texas State Capitol, Austin, Texas, USA.

In response, I have authored a formal proposal, endorsed by historical, environmental, and civic organizations throughout the Rio Grande Valley, to designate *Sabal mexicana* as the Official State Palm of Texas for the 90th Texas Legislature in 2027. As a preservationist, celebrating the ecological heritage of the Rio Grande Valley is an easy calling to protect and cherish the area that is home.

*Logan Dovalina is a Texas Master Naturalist, Texas Master Gardener, and preservationist from the Rio Grande Valley. He is the 2025–2026 Markers and Research Chair for the Hidalgo County Historical Commission, and a member of the Palm Society of South Texas and the International Palm Society.*



## Conservation: What's Going On in Vietnam

By Glenn Franklin, IPS board member

Vietnam's plant biodiversity has been severely affected by decades of war, rapid industrialization, and illegal logging. While the country has successfully increased its total forest cover, much of this is compromised, consisting of monoculture plantations (like acacia or rubber) rather than rich, biodiverse natural forests.

The damage in Vietnam is no longer just about the quantity of vegetation, but the quality of the ecosystem as well. Current problems include:

- **Fragmentation and "Empty Forest" Syndrome:** While green cover exists, many forests are fragmented. Intense snaring and hunting have removed seed-dispersing animals (monkeys, birds, small mammals), leading to "empty forests" where trees and palms cannot naturally reproduce or move seeds across the landscape.
- **The Rise of Monocultures:** Large areas have been replanted with exotic species like acacia and casuarina. These grow fast and provide timber but offer almost no habitat for native wildlife and fail to support the complex undergrowth found in primary jungles.
- **Endangered Flora:** According to the 2024 Vietnam Red List, the number of threatened plant species has risen to 656.
- **Soil Degradation:** In areas like the Central Highlands and coastal dunes, the loss of original vegetation has led to severe soil erosion and a loss of the seed bank—the natural store of seeds in the soil that allows a forest to bounce back.

Karst vegetation under pressure from mining and agriculture in Tam Diep, Ninh Binh



Vietnam is a biodiversity hotspot for palms, but many species are restricted to small refugia. The most critical locations for endangered palms include:

Region	Notable Endangered Palms	Key Habitats
<b>Central Vietnam</b> (Quảng Ngãi, Thừa Thiên Huế)	<i>Truongsonia lecongkietii</i> , various <i>Licuala</i> species	Steep, moist slopes in the Truong Son (Annamite) Range.
<b>Northern Limestone Karsts</b> (Hạ Long Bay, Ninh Bình)	<i>Guihaia grossifibrosa</i> (Dragon Scale Palm)	Clinging to the sheer cliffs of ancient limestone "towers."
<b>Southern Highlands</b> (Đà Lạt, Lâm Đồng)	<i>Pinanga</i> and <i>Calamus</i> species	Subtropical montane forests often threatened by coffee plantations.
<b>National Parks</b> (Cúc Phương, Bạch Mã, Phong Nha-Kẻ Bàng)	Multiple endemic rattans (climbing palms)	Dense, undisturbed primary rainforests.

You cannot rebuild without the original genetic material. Locating and protecting the remaining mother trees and palms is a top first priority as they are sources for indigenous seeds. There needs to be a move away from commercial nurseries that foster monocultures. Local nurseries would focus on framework species—a mix of indigenous trees and palms that grow fast and have big crowns to shade out weeds, nurture seedlings and attract seed-dispersing wildlife. Connecting fragmented patches of forest will also allow wildlife to move about dispersing seeds.

This gives you a quick overview of how Vietnam is working to bring back ecosystems that were lost due mostly to human excess and war. Those of you who attended the Vietnam biennial took the trip of a lifetime!



## A Word from IPS President, Dr. Andy Hurwitz

### We are meeting our mission!

Research: over \$600,000 in grants since 1986 and several consecutive years of \$20,000 research stipends.

Education: seventy consecutive years of publishing our peer-reviewed journal PALMS.

Conservation: Six consecutive years achieving our fundraising goal and truly making a difference in worldwide palm and habitat conservation.

We recently received two significant bequests. We queried the families and they told us that the IPS was included in the will because, "We are doing good work."

## Donate to Celebrate 70 Years of the IPS

Dent Smith founded the Palm Society 70 years ago this year in Daytona Beach, Florida. The efforts of the founders of the IPS brought a focus to palms that has since expanded in the worlds of science, horticulture, and conservation. To mark the milestone, we're raising money from April 17 to 30 to fund the Society's support of research, education, and conservation.

### Give now!

Do you love PalmTalk? Have you enjoyed one of the biennial tours? Have you made friends with a fellow palm person thanks to the Society? Do you look forward to the quarterly PALMS journal landing in your mailbox? Have you visited palm gardens with your local affiliate society?

Show your gratitude by pitching in to support the International Palm Society on our birthday.

IPS funding supports the July, 2026, World Palm Symposium in Singapore, an international scientific gathering focused on palm biology, conservation, research, and horticulture. New generations of researchers are finding a path into palm scholarship thanks in part to our support.

Direct IPS funding in 2026 is supporting scientists doing research on palms in Costa Rica, Brazil, Mexico, and Indonesia.

Our annual Save The Species campaign connects donors to projects that combine sound science with hands-on conservation—both in habitat and in cultivation—turning a shared passion for palms into lasting global impact.

Your [70th anniversary donation](#) will help us invest in palms worldwide.



## Upcoming Travel with the International Palm Society

Watch for updates in future newsletters about travel with the IPS, including:

- 2027 (March): Eastern Himalayas, South India and Sri Lanka IPS Benefactor trip
- 2027 (April 22 – April 28): IPS midterm meeting and tour in Palm Beach, Florida, for Directors and Benefactors in partnership with the Palm Beach Palm and Cycad Society. Post-tour April 28 – April 30.
- 2027 (September): Palm Weekend by IPS, San Francisco
- 2028: 35th IPS Biennial, Fiji
- 2029: Palm Weekend by IPS, Miami





## Correspondence

We welcome your emails and contributions to the newsletter. In our next edition, look for a report from Miami on growing an exceptional Brazilian palm, and meet the latest Palm Hero award winner.

The Central Florida Palm and Cycad Society's inaugural annual sale at St. Johns Botanical Garden and Nature Preserve is scheduled for May 2nd. Additional information and links for this event and others are available in the Events section of [CFPACS.com](http://CFPACS.com).



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