

## DISCOVERY TRAILS

### UMkomba, the Pondoland Palm

Susan Eubank, Arboretum Librarian

I just finished a survey on diversity. It asked the question of what do I think of when I hear that word. I think the survey was really asking about personnel interactions. The word "diversity" doesn't often make me think of that unless I'm participating in "office" training, because I work in an Arboretum where "diversity" is busting out all the time with all its possible variations and most often its beauty.

In our new Aloe Trail, we don't just have aloes (although the diversity of aloes there is amazing), we have examples of other South African plants that most uproariously show off the diversity of the plant world. That same day I also heard a radio program on our struggling California Condor. The Arboretum also shows how diversity allows for plants to flourish or become threatened in their environment and how we can try to help them continue to flourish as is the case with the California Condor.

Pondoland Palm or Dwarf Coconut Palm or as Xhosa-speaking AmaMpondo call it, uMkomba, is an example of both of my musings on diversity. A small specimen of that wonderful palm was just moved to our new Aloe Trail. Look for a scruffy, little palm at the northernmost end of the new pathway off to the west on a mound. That scruffy plant is the offspring of a vulnerable palm in its native habitat, but like the Condor, it is now beloved by those who know it. This helps spread the palm to other places like Southern California, but doesn't necessarily protect it in its native habitat.

If you would like a little more adventure in The Arboretum, try looking for the larger, *Jubaeopsis caffra* which resides behind a grove of saw palmettos (*Serenoa repens*) directly south of the road, south of the Adobe.

Its native habitat is just two river deltas (5 1/2 to 8 miles apart) on the eastern coast of South Africa, in the district of Lusikisiki. One of the river areas is now in the Mkambati Nature Reserve

which was a former leper colony until 1950's. The palm grows right along the river on steep sandstone cliffs all the way to the ocean. Because the leper colony did not impact the landscape, the palms have continued to flourish in this limited area.

*I work in an Arboretum where "diversity" is busting out all the time with all its possible variations and most often its beauty.*

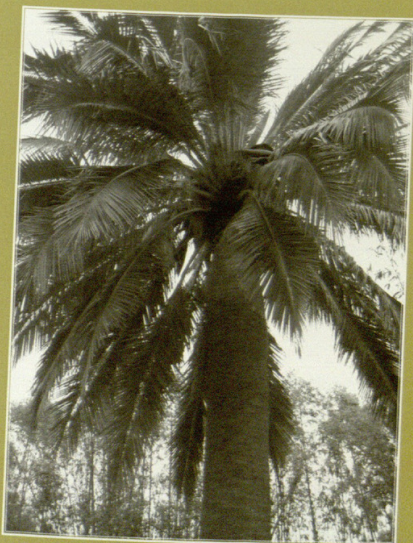
This palm is also interesting, because its closest palm relatives are the Chilean Wine Palm (*Jubea chilensis*, also here at The Arboretum with beautiful specimens) and the Forest Coconut (*Voanioala gerardii*). These other two palms are also monotypic genera (a kind of plant that doesn't have any other close relatives) and from very limited habitats like uMkomba. The Chilean Wine Palm is from Chile and the other is from the coast of northeastern Madagascar. Imagine what the Earth's landforms looked like when these palms grew 'near' each other. That certainly stretches our image of 'diversity'. These palms are also considered a close relative of the Coconut palm (*Coco nucifera*), whose place of nativity is highly disputed, but currently is thought to have originated in the Gondwanaland that split and created the Pacific and Indian Oceans and left the Malaysian Peninsula behind. That would again place it in the vicinity of the others. The uMkomba fruit does look like a dwarf coconut and is foodstuff for the AmaMpondo as well as local animal populations. It even contains 'coconut milk'.

Yes, when I think of diversity, the first thing that comes to my mind is how plants have broadened my thinking and yes, that does apply to personnel interactions and makes me realize how wonderful human diversity is too.





UMkombo Palm



Chilean Wine Palm

## Resources from the Arboretum Library used for this article:

- Barry, David, Jr., "The African Relatives of the Chilean Wine Palm." *Principes*, v. 1, no. 5 (Oct. 1957), p. 180-182.
- Dransfield, John and Henk Beentje. *The Palms of Madagascar*. Kew: Royal Botanic Gardens, 1995. QK 495 .P17 .D764p
- Dransfield, John, "Voanioala, the Forest Coconut." *Principes*, v. 36, no. 3 (July 1992), p. 124-127.
- Harries, Hugh C., "Biogeography of the Coconut, *Coco nucifera* L." *Principes*, v. 36, no. 3 (July 1992), p. 155-162.
- Hertich, William. *Palms and Cycads: Their Culture in Southern California as Observed Chiefly in the Huntington Botanical Gardens*. San Marino: Calif.: Huntington Library, 1951. BP PAL HE
- International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, <http://www.iucnredlist.org>
- Jones, David L., "Palms Throughout the World." Kew: Royal Botanic Gardens, 1995. QK 495 P17 J76pt
- Kepe, Thembelela, *Communities, entitlements and nature reserves: the case of the wild coast, South Africa*. Presented at "Crossing Boundaries," the seventh annual conference of the International Association for the Study of Common Property, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, June 10-14, 1998. <http://dlc.dlib.indiana.edu/archive/00000071/00/kepe.pdf>
- Langlois, Arthur C. "Supplement to Palms of the World." Gainesville, FL.: University of Florida Book, 1976. QK 495 P17 L284s
- Moore, Harold E., Jr. "Endangerment at the Specific and Generic Levels in Palms." *Principes*, v. 23, no. 2 (Apr. 1979), p. 47-64.
- Muirhead, Desmond. "Palms." *Globe*, Ariz.: Dale Stuart King, [1960] SB 413 P171 M953p
- Riffle, Robert Lee, & Paul Craft. *An Encyclopedia of Cultivated Palms*, Portland, Ore.: Timber Press, 2003, p. 359-360. (on our Library wishlist at [www.arboretum.org](http://www.arboretum.org) Library section)
- Schuiling, M. and H.C. Harries. "The coconut palm in East Africa. 1. East African Tall." *Principes*, v. 31, no. 1 (Jan. 1994), p. 4-11
- Story, Robert, "The Pondoland Palm." *Principes*, v. 3, no. 3 (July 1959), p. 102-106.
- Vitkievitz, Mike. "The California spotlight: Pauline Sullivan." *Principes*, v. 32, no. 3 (July 1988), p. 124-128.
- Wicht, Hein, *Palms for Gardens in southern Africa*. Cape Town: Howard Timmins, 1962. B9 PAL WI



Eubank, Susan. 2006. "Discovery trails: umkomba, the pondoland palm." *Arboretum members' magazine* (6), 10–11.

**View This Item Online:** <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/141419>

**Permalink:** <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/144617>

**Holding Institution**

Missouri Botanical Garden, Peter H. Raven Library

**Sponsored by**

Los Angeles Arboretum

**Copyright & Reuse**

Copyright Status: In copyright. Digitized with the permission of the rights holder.

License: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/>

Rights: <https://biodiversitylibrary.org/permissions>

This document was created from content at the **Biodiversity Heritage Library**, the world's largest open access digital library for biodiversity literature and archives. Visit BHL at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org>.