



Asterogyne yaracuyense **A. J. Hend. & Steyerm.**

Status: Critically endangered (CR B1 + 2c)

Common name

Unknown

Natural range

Known only from the understory of the Cerro La Chapa cloud forest, in the northern Coastal Cordillera, state of Yaracuy, Venezuela; recently reported on the Cerro El Zapatero of the same state (Dr. Winfried Meier, pers. comm.), at 1200–1400 m.

Recognition characteristics

Asterogyne yaracuyense is a solitary, unarmed, monoecious palm. The stems are erect or sometimes basally decumbent, 3–6 m tall x 5–8 cm diam., occasionally with basal and lateral vegetative branches. Leaves 18–31, reddish brown when young, green when mature; sheath 12–30 x 7–9 cm; petiole 18–35 x 1–1.5 cm, blade 0.70–1.20 x 0.23–0.30 m, with a deeply bifid apex of ca. 42 cm; primary veins 40–70 per side. The inflorescence is interfoliar and branched to 1 order; peduncle 85–95 cm long x 1.5–2 cm diam.; rachis 5–10 cm long x 0.5 cm diam.; rachillae 9–16, slightly pendent, glabrous; flower pits spirally arranged, covered with an inflexed lower lip, 2.5–3 x 2–5 mm. Flowers unisexual, white. The fruits are not known.

Natural history

Aspects of its natural history are unknown

Threats to survival

Recent visits to the Cerro la Chapa, home of the largest population of the species, have confirmed the great alteration of the forest due to agricultural and cattle farming activities. A system of small plots in the cloud forest has been developed in order to promote the following activities:

1. cultivation of bananas, coffee, tubers and other subsistence agriculture practices;
2. cattle raising of low intensity and precariously profitable, where the animals graze in the forested areas and have to be forced into the surrounding cloud forest to access other pasture grounds;
3. construction associated with human activities such as houses, water tanks for irrigation, fences to separate plots and roads.

As a consequence, there has been an uncontrollable alteration of the physiognomy and floristic diversity of the cloud forest. The present population of *Asterogyne yaracuyense* has been roughly estimated to be 200–300 individuals, and the possibility for survival is low for the individuals that have managed to succeed in those very disturbed environments.

Current Conservation Measures

None.

Additional Necessary Conservation Actions

The taxonomic status of this species is well established, and no further morphological studies are apparently required in order to separate this species from the rest of the taxa within *Asterogyne*. The increasing threats mentioned above lend urgency to the need to carry out a thorough inventory of the populations in both Cerro La Chapa and Cerro Zapatero. The absence of current government regulation protecting the whole area makes of *ex situ* cultivation necessary to avoid the imminent extinction of the species. The reintroduction of the species may be the only way to regenerate the natural populations once the factors threatening the natural habitats are minimized.

References

Scientific Contributors

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Adult individual of *Asterogyne yaracuyense* in its natural habitat of Cerro La Chapa. Photo by F. W. Stauffer.