



Copernicia fallaensis León

Status: **Critically endangered (CR)**

Common name

Yarey, yarey macho.

Natural range

Copernicia fallaensis is an endemic species of the central part of Cuba. Originally it was widespread at the provinces of Camagüey, Ciego de Ávila and Villa Clara, but today the best population is found in Ranchuelo, near Falla (the type locality). Outside of this area, only scattered individuals are found. Today, this palm is part of secondary savannas; originally it was a component of semideciduous forest on heavy clay and fertile soils in lowlands at 10–20 m.a.s.l.

Recognition characteristics

Copernicia fallaensis has the largest dimensions of any species in the genus. Its trunk is up to 20 m tall and 0.8 m in diameter. The petiole is robust, up to 174 cm long and 7 cm wide at the apex. Its margins are coarsely spiny at the basal. The hastula is up to 8.5 cm long. The leaf blade is ovate, more than 200 cm long, with a costa up to 30 cm long. The blade has up to 120 segments. The inflorescences are many branched, up to 3.6 m long. The rachillae (flower-bearing branches) are 4 or 5 cm long. Flowers are solitary and very close together. The fruit is globose, up to 23 cm long and 19 mm in diameter.

Natural history

Flowering occurs in May and June, coinciding with the onset of the first rainy season. No systematic pollination study was made in this species, but informal observations indicate that insects are involved. The fruits develop in four months, and they are mature in late September and early October, coinciding with a second rainy season. As with other species of the genus, fruits consumed by bats, which disperse the seeds. Most germination occurs after just one month.

Threats to survival

The large leaves of this palm are traditionally used by the farmers to make hats, brushes, baskets and many other articles. The leaves are removed for thatch too. When the palm was abundant, this traditional use was not a threat, but now the largest remaining population in the type locality is only of 84 adult trees, and overexploitation is the principal threat to this species.

Current Conservation Measures

The census in the largest population at Ranchuelo shows 84 adults and 187 juveniles, some isolated individuals are distributed nearby and in other sites where the species was reported in the past. Las Tunas Botanic Garden is working in education in the community and has coordination with the local authorities for conservation of this palm. With participation of local peoples seeds were collected, and an *ex situ* collection of 50 specimens was established.

Additional Necessary Conservation Actions

A more extensive field survey is necessary in Florida, Camagüey and Esperanza, Villa Clara, two localities where the species was reported, to verify the remaining individuals and complete the census. Continued monitoring of the wild population, education of the local communities in sustainable use and reinforcement of the remaining populations are also needed.

References

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Copernicia fallaensis in a secondary savannas in the wild (Ranchuelo, near Falla, in Ciego de Ávila province, Cuba).