

Dypsis sanctaemariae

J. Dransf.

Status: **Critically endangered (CR)**

Common name

None recorded.

Natural range

Dypsis sanctaemariae is restricted to coastal forest in the northeast of the small island of Sainte Marie that lies off the east coast of Madagascar. It occurs on gentle slopes, at an elevation of approximately 10 m above sea level.

Recognition characteristics

It is a small palm of the forest undergrowth, with clustering stems to 2.5 m tall and ca. 2 cm in diameter. There is a short crownshaft composed of yellow-green or crimson leaf sheaths. The leaf blades are held more or less erect forming a shuttlecock crown; they are generally up to 120 cm long and can be either undivided except for a brief fork at the tip, or split irregularly into two very broad leaflets on each side of the main rib. The inflorescence is between the leaves and held erect, and carries 5–6 branches on the ca. 45 cm long peduncle. Fruits have never been seen.

Natural history

Little is known about the natural history of the species.

Threats to survival

The littoral forest throughout Madagascar is extremely fragile and much of it has been lost to shifting cultivation and coastal development. What remains on Sainte Marie is in an even more precarious state. Fires, set to clear land for cultivation during the dry season, have devastated most of the remaining natural vegetation cover on Sainte Marie.

Current Conservation Measures

There are no current conservation measures. Without the recognition of the biodiversity value of the remaining forest fragments on Sainte Marie, and the setting up of protected areas to include them, the prospects for survival of this species are bleak.

Additional Necessary Conservation Actions

A demographic study of the palm should be performed and it should also be searched for in remaining littoral forest fragments occurring on the mainland nearby.

Ex situ collections should be established as a back-up strategy before the littoral forest is totally destroyed

References

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