

# GROWING

## *Beccariophoenix fenestralis*

### Previously *Beccariophoenix madagascariensis*

## IN PALM BEACH COUNTY

*Submitted by Charlie Beck*

*Beccariophoenix madagascariensis* is a large, solitary, monoecious palm native to Madagascar. Its pinnate fronds grow 16 feet long and its stem can reach 40 feet in height. Young leaves display windows in the distal position of the leaf blade. The fronds have very short petioles and the stems display tightly woven brown fiber around the leaf bases. Inflorescences emerge from torpedo shaped peduncular bracts.

*B. madagascariensis* was first described in 1915. In the mid 1980s *B. madagascariensis* was

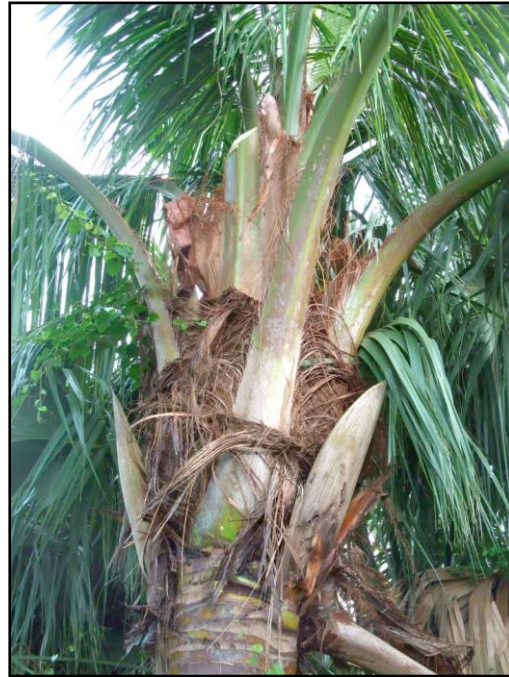
considered extinct. It was rediscovered in the late 1980s. It was found in two distinct areas with less than 20 individuals at each location. Since that time seeds of this palm have been distributed worldwide to palm enthusiasts. Because of its restricted distribution in Madagascar, this palm's conservation status is listed as critical. The southernmost location in Madagascar where this palm occurs is actually outside the tropics. This area is subtropical and the soil in this area is white sand. This similarity of habitat with Palm Beach County makes *B. madagascariensis* an excellent choice for our gardens.

We have a single large specimen of *B. madagascariensis* planted in our garden. It has grown at a steady pace. I would not consider this a fast growing palm. In 16 years the stem measures 14 feet tall. The stem measures 19 inches in diameter at waist height but flares to 29 inches diameter at ground level. The leaves measure 15 feet long, but its upright growth pattern yields a smaller footprint. Our palm is planted on the fringe of our irrigation system so growth rate would probably be increased if it was planted in the center of the zone. It is also planted in a high area not prone to inundation during times of heavy rainfall.

A distinctive feature of this palm is that the leaflets unfurl as they emerge from the bud so no spear leaf is ever apparent on this palm. The scale of this palm is similar to a coconut palm. It would be a good substitute for a coconut if lethal yellowing and large falling fruit is a concern. The 2004-2005 hurricanes did not affect our specimen but it was not tall enough then to truly be tested.

Many of the palms of Madagascar are difficult to grow in Palm Beach County. *B. madagascariensis* is one which is well adapted to our growing conditions. It has survived our recent record cold winters with no effect and with regular fertilization and irrigation has never shown any nutritional deficiencies. This striking palm would be a great addition to your garden.

GROWING CONDITIONS IN THE BECK GARDEN FOR <i>Beccariophoenix madagascariensis</i>	
Location	4 miles from ocean in suburban Lantana
Soil	Sand over a layer of hardpan (pineland flatwood habitat)
Irrigation	¾ inch applied twice a week
Fertilization	4 times a year with Palm special analysis
Light	Full sun (partial shade when young)
Micronutrient Deficiencies	None
Insect Damage	None observed
Cold Hardiness	No damage observed
Hurricane Resistance	Untested



**Sixteen year-old *Beccariophoenix madagascariensis* growing in the Beck garden.**

*(Photos by Charlie Beck)*



**Juvenile *Beccariophoenix madagascariensis*  
displaying windows in the distal portion of leaf blade.**

*(Photograph contributed to the Palm & Cycad Societies of Australia website  
(<http://pacsoa.org>) by Tom Turner and reprinted with permission of PACSOA.)*

## ***Beccariophoenix* Update**

***Submitted by Charlie Beck***

A new species of *Beccariophoenix* has been recently described by John Dransfield and Mijoro Rakotoarinivo. It was reported in the June 2014 issue of Palms – Journal of the International Palm Society. This species is new in name only. Actually, this palm was widely distributed in the 1990s and sold as *Beccariophoenix madagascariensis*.

*Beccariophoenix fenestralis* is the new name for the palm that many of us have growing in our gardens. This is the palm which has broad seedling leaflets with conspicuous windows. The leaflet windows do not persist in mature leaves. *B. fenestralis* is a vigorous palm which thrives in our sandy soil. There are only two mature plants known in habitat. One plant is beside a road and this plant has supplied all of the seeds which were distributed worldwide. *B. fenestralis* is a low elevation palm found below 525 feet altitude.

*B. alfredii* and *B. madagascariensis* are the other two species of *Beccariophoenix*. Both of these palms have thin seedling leaflets with inconspicuous windows or no windows at all. Both of these palms grow at higher altitudes. *B. alfredii* is a vigorous grower but the true *B. madagascariensis* is very slow growing.