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PHOTO FEATURE

Calamus andamanicus Kurz

The Andaman-Nicobar Islands and their insular palms are of great interest with wide range of distribution from the tidal swamps to hilltop vegetations. Wild palms are one of the well represented insular groups of plant taxa with remarkable degree of endemism and a few are on the road of extinction in near future. These isolated, mostly uninhabited, insular provinces in the Bay of Bengal are considered to be one of the centers of origin of certain popular cultivated palms like coconut and areca nut palms. The wild occurrence of these palms with several intra specific variants in some of the uninhabited islands of this Archipelago was reported by Kurz in 1876 and Prain in 1891. Apart from this, the natural occurrence of another zoological entity reported from these islands popularly known as 'Robber Crab' (*Birgus latro* L.), that feeds on coconut kernel illustrates as a remarkable evidence in suggesting that these islands may be one of the centers of origin of these widely cultivated palms across the world. The 'rattans' of Andaman-Nicobar Islands are one of the fascinating components of the insular vegetation. Champion and Seth (1968) in their classification of the forest types have well demarcated the "cane brakes" found to occur along the interior forest valleys of these islands, as a distinct type of vegetation, thereby recording the abundance of rattans in the tropical rain forests of Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The spiny climbing shrubs among the palms popularly known as the 'Rattans', comprise with three genera in Andaman-Nicobar Islands, *viz. Calamus, Daemonorops and Korthalsia,* accounted with around 18 taxa. This group is rather lesser known among the insular palms are of great importance in cane industry. *Calamus andamicus* is said to be the second best raw material for the cane industry. Nevertheless, from the industrial point of view, this species is rather lesser known to the world. *Calamus andamicus* is the most common endemic rattan species found to occur in semi-evergreen and evergreen forests of the Andaman Islands having promising economic importance in cane industry of the country. This is robust single stemmed cane specie growing over 40m in length. Leaves are 3m long armed with serrate whorls of spiny sheaths and a terminal long whip-like re curved thorny tendril. Rachis also armed with semi-whorled blackish spines. Flowers are creamy-white in tubular spadix. Fruits are 1.5 x 0.6 cm in size, globose-ovoid with golden-yellow trapezoid scales. The generic epithet of *Calamus* was derived from the Greek name '*Kalamos*' referred to the meaning as 'any aquatic reed with hollow stem' and the specific epithet designating the type locality of the taxon. The germplasm collection of this species is well conserving outside islands at the Field Gene Bank of Jawaharlal Nehru Tropical Botanic Garden (JNTBGRI) and the Field Conservatory of Center for Biodiversity Conservation, University of Kerala. The various field studies carried out by the Field Gene Bank of JNTBGRI have proved that this species would certainly be a better component for the silviculture programmes for Southern Western Ghats foot hills.

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