



THE NEW YORK BOTANICAL GARDEN

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First-ever Book on Mekong Rattan Species Provides Vital Information For Sustainable Use of a Versatile, Economically Important Resource

The New York Botanical Garden and the World Wildlife Fund Collaborate To Produce Catalog of 65 Species, Including Two New to Science, in Three Southeast Asian Countries



Harvesting Rattan in Cambodia (Photo © Eng Mengey/WWF-Cambodia)

In a major advance for the sustainable use of a critical natural resource, The New York Botanical Garden and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) have released the most comprehensive catalog of the rattan species found in three Southeast Asian countries, including specific information that makes it possible to determine how much rattan can be harvested without depleting natural stocks of these versatile, economically important plants.

Systematics, Ecology and Management of Rattans in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam—The Biological Bases of Sustainable Use includes scientific data on the 65 known rattan species that grow in the three countries, including two species found only in Cambodia that are new to science. The book is the result of eight years of research by Botanical Garden scientists and WWF experts.

“This book represents the most comprehensive analysis of rattans ever compiled anywhere in the world,” said co-author Dr. Charles M. Peters, Kate E. Tode Curator of Botany at the Botanical Garden and a leading authority on the management of tropical forests. “It is unique in that this single volume addresses the ecological, taxonomic, and silvicultural aspects of a valuable forest resource. Most important, we want people to understand that you can’t sustainably harvest more than the annual growth of rattan from a forest in one year.”

Joining Dr. Peters as co-author is Andrew J. Henderson, Ph.D., Abess Curator of Palms at the Garden and a leading authority on the systematics, taxonomy and biology of palms, which include rattans. As part of his field research on this project, he discovered and named the two Cambodian rattan species new to science, *Calamus mellitus* (common name in Khmer: *Pdao Toek Khmom*) and *Calamus kampucheaensis* (common name in Khmer: *Pdao Bonla Dong Penh*).

Rattan, a \$6.5 billion industry worldwide, is one of the most important non-timber forest products in the Greater Mekong region. Various species support local livelihoods as sources of food, material for shelter, and products with export value such as rattan furniture. However, forest conversion and unsustainable harvesting are leading to serious declines in rattan stocks, threatening a key part of the region’s economy.

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The book, which is available in English, Khmer, Vietnamese and Lao language versions, aims to help both naturalists and those in the rattan industry in identifying rattan species, while providing guidance in maximizing yields and achieving sustainable production of rattan, which is harvested in the wild because cultivation has not proven viable. The new publication also details lessons learned in numerous aspects of the rattan industry, from sustainable management planning to processing and export policies.



Calamus kampucheaensis, one of two Cambodian rattan species new to science, has especially sharp spines. (Photo © Koulang Chey/WWF-Cambodia)

“We are delighted to launch this book, which clearly demonstrates that sustainable rattan management, production and trade is the only way to ensure the Mekong rattan industry will continue and thrive into the future,” said Chhith Sam Ath, WWF-Cambodia’s Country Director. “We urge Greater Mekong governments to use this resource as they urgently develop and implement rattan management plans.”

100 Communities in Three Countries Are Already Engaged in Sustainable Production

Chhith noted that local communities in Siem Reap Province and the Tonle Sap region in northwestern Cambodia are using a rattan species found only in Cambodia (*Calamus salicifolius*, known in Khmer as *Lpeak*) to produce high-quality baskets and handicrafts that are exported to Thailand and other international markets. “This unique species is only found in Cambodia and is therefore critical to our country’s biodiversity and the future of our rattan industry,” Chhith said.

To ensure rattan harvesting and processing do not endanger rattan and forest resources but instead offer new sources of long-term income for rural people, WWF has embarked on an ambitious project with communities and companies in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. The end goal is to help improve management of rattan in the Greater Mekong region. One hundred communities in the three countries are currently engaged in sustainable rattan production. In Cambodia, 11 communities made up of 5,400 households are involved in a sustainable rattan production chain from harvest to market.

In addition to the rattan book, the Garden and WWF-Greater Mekong have collaborated with relevant government and development partners to promote sustainable rattan management. In Laos, this collaboration has resulted in the world’s first rattan products to be certified as sustainably harvested by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). It has also facilitated the establishment of the Rattan Association of Cambodia and the Vietnam Rattan Programme—important mechanisms for ensuring that producers secure benefits from the growing demand for sustainable rattan products.

“With support from WWF, I am engaged in rattan forest management, harvesting and selling FSC-certified rattan at a high price,” said Jai Singsombath, head of the weaving group in Thaveng Village in Bolikhamxay province, Laos. “More importantly, I am, together with other villagers, engaged in processing and weaving to improve our lives, with an average income of \$150 per month during the production period.”

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The collaborative effort to develop a sustainable rattan industry in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, including the new rattan book, was made possible thanks to financial support from IKEA, the European Commission's SWITCH-Asia Programme, and DEG-Germany's Entrepreneurial Development Cooperation.

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The New York Botanical Garden is a museum of plants, an educational institution, and a scientific research organization. Founded in 1891, the Botanical Garden is one of the world's preeminent centers for studying plants at all levels, from the whole organism down to its DNA. Garden scientists conduct fundamental research on plants, algae, and fungi globally, as well as on the many relationships between plants and people. A National Historic Landmark, the Garden's 250-acre site is one of the greatest botanical gardens in the world and the largest in any city in the United States, distinguished by the beauty of its diverse landscape and extensive collections and gardens, as well as by the scope and excellence of its programs in horticulture, education, and science. Learn more: nybg.org

The New York Botanical Garden, 2900 Southern Boulevard, Bronx, New York 10458

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