

Field Museum of Natural History

FOUNDED BY MARSHALL FIELD, 1883

Roosevelt Road and Field Drive, Chicago

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FIELD MUSEUM NEWS

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Members are requested to inform the Museum promptly of changes of address.

A NEW VEGETABLE WAX

By B. E. DAHLGREN

CHIEF CURATOR, DEPARTMENT OF BOTANY

Importers of South American raw materials are offering a new vegetable product under the name of "ouricury wax." Its appearance and physical properties are very similar to the darker grades of the well-known carnaúba wax from northeastern Brazil, which is the most important ingredient of floor-wax and automobile polishes. Like carnaúba wax, ouricury is the product of a palm. It is not at all closely related to the fan-leaved carnaúba palm, although it grows in a somewhat similar environment in the area to the south and east of the semi-arid Carnaúba zone of northeastern Brazil. In both cases the wax is produced as a thin coating on the leaves of the plant, affording, no doubt, in a hot and dry region, some protection against excessive evaporation of water.

Of the two waxes, the ouricury is by far the more troublesome to gather. Being firmly adherent to the leaf even in the dried state, it cannot be loosened like carnaúba wax simply by beating the cut leaves after a few days of drying. Ouricury wax must be obtained from the dried leaves by a much more time-consuming process of scraping the upper surface of the many divisions of the feather-veined leaf. This is done with a knife or a piece of broken glass. The result is a rather coarse, dirty-yellow powder consisting of wax mixed with fragments of leaf epidermis. This crude wax is

then cleaned by sifting, liquefied by heat, strained, and poured into molds.

The palm that yields the ouricury wax is one of the small-fruited Cocos palms, numerous in South America, and characteristic of that continent. The species concerned, *Coco coronata* or *Syagrus coronata*, forms a small or medium-sized tree, with a trunk six to eight inches in diameter and a crown of rather stiff and short feather-veined leaves. The leaves are arranged in five spiral rows, strikingly evident at the point of their attachment to the trunk. The palm is extremely abundant in the state of Bahia, where its common name is "licury." As a name for the wax this would have been preferable to the market designation, "ouricury." The latter has long been well-known as the common name for a very different palm from a region far removed from that of the licury and is therefore obviously confusing.

While licury palm wax is of relatively recent introduction, the licury palm has long been known and esteemed as a source of oil. This is obtained from the kernels of its fruit, generally by expression. Where the palm is abundant the oil is a considerable source of revenue. It is estimated that there are billions of these palms in the state of Bahia alone, a total capable of yielding the inhabitants an income comparable to that furnished by the coffee crop of other states. Unfortunately, the extensive cutting of leaves for wax is not conducive to the vigorous growth required for great oil production, but nevertheless the opportunities for the expansion of both of these products are enormous. To date the exploitation is confined to trees growing wild. As usual in the case of tropical forest products, not only the quality and abundance of the product, but accessibility, transportation facilities, and density of population are important considerations governing the prospects of the industry.

On exhibition in Hall 25 (Case 47) of the Department of Botany are a leaf and fruit of the ouricury palm, and a specimen of the wax. In the same hall is an exhibit pertaining to the carnaúba palm and its wax.

Botanical Expedition to California

An expedition left Field Museum toward the end of August to study and collect the cryptogamic plants of California. The party will spend several weeks in the northern mountainous counties, giving special attention to the algae and mosses of the region. A week will be devoted to collecting in the vicinity of San Francisco Bay to secure additional material of, and to study in the living condition, the numerous species of microscopic algae described from there in the past. The remainder of the six or eight weeks will be taken up with studies of the flora of the San Joaquin and Imperial

Valleys in the central and southern parts of the state. The members of the expedition, Dr. Francis Drouet, Curator of Cryptogamic Botany, and Mr. Donald Richards, of the Hull Botanical Laboratory, University of Chicago, plan to return to Chicago during the latter part of October.

Staff Notes

Mr. Llewelyn Williams, Curator of Economic Botany, on a recent trip to the state of Washington visited logging camps and sawmills of the White River Lumber Company, Enumclaw; The Weyerhaeuser Lumber Company, Longview, and others. He was a guest also of the Lathrop Pack Forestry Station, La Grande. Selections were made of exhibition material of noble fir, Sitka spruce, and alder, three species which are still needed to complete the American timber display in Charles F. Millspaugh Hall. Herbarium specimens were collected along the Pacific coast.

Mr. Carl F. Gronemann, for many years the Museum's Illustrator, has been retired on pension, due to advancing years and ill health. His assistant, Mr. John Janecek, has been appointed Illustrator.

Dr. Fritz Haas, Curator of Lower Invertebrates, attended the annual meeting of The American Malacological Union, at Thomaston, Maine, August 26-29, and lectured on "The Habits of Life of Some West Coast Bivalves."

A FEW FACTS ABOUT FIELD MUSEUM

Field Museum is open every day of the year (except Christmas and New Year's Day) during the hours indicated below:

November, December,
January, February . . . 9 A.M. to 4 P.M.
March, April, and
September, October . . . 9 A.M. to 5 P.M.
May, June, July, August. 9 A.M. to 6 P.M.

Admission is free to Members on all days. Other adults are admitted free on Thursdays, Saturdays, and Sundays; non-members pay 25 cents on other days. Children are admitted free on all days. Students and faculty members of educational institutions are admitted free any day upon presentation of credentials.

The Museum's Library is open for reference daily except Saturday afternoon and Sunday.

Traveling exhibits are circulated in the schools of Chicago by the N. W. Harris Public School Extension Department of the Museum.

Lectures at schools, and special entertainments and tours for children at the Museum, are provided by the James Nelson and Anna Louise Raymond Foundation for Public School and Children's Lectures.

Free courses of lectures for adults are presented in the James Simpson Theatre on Saturday afternoons (at 2:30 o'clock) in March, April, October, and November.

A Cafeteria serves visitors. Rooms are available also for those bringing their lunches.

Chicago Motor Coach Company No. 26 busses provide direct transportation to the Museum. Service is offered also by Surface Lines, Rapid Transit Lines (the "L"), interurban electric lines, and Illinois Central trains. There is ample free parking space for automobiles at the Museum.



1941. "Botanical Expedition to California." *Field Museum news* 12(9), 6-6.

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