

## Palms of the Leeward Antilles: a model for conservation success

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Effective plant conservation requires synergy among *in situ* protection, public participation, botanical understanding, and *ex situ* conservation. Recent strategic planning for living conservation collections led to the description of two new palm species from the Leeward Antilles. *Sabal antillensis* is endemic to Curacao, while *S. lougheediana* is endemic to Bonaire. Long before taxonomic clarification, both species had a detailed conservation survey in 1979. Forty years later, resurvey of both species using identical methods showed disparate pathways: *S. antillensis* vastly increased in census and range, while *S. lougheediana* collapsed in range and census – becoming one of the absolute rarest species with only 25 surviving palms. Conservation success on Curacao resulted from diligent management. Replicating that success became a top priority on Bonaire, and an international effort to protect and conserve *S. lougheediana* is now underway. A combined program of *in situ* and *ex situ* conservation, informed and guided by next-generation population genomic data, ensures that the Bonaire Palms will not go extinct. These findings provide a model for palm conservation elsewhere: detailed study highlights uniqueness, which mobilizes government and private conservation action. This study demonstrates how botanical science, public participation, *in situ* protection, and *ex situ* conservation combine to bring a beloved plant back from the brink of extinction.