

COLLECTIONS NEWS

Paul Mills Presents Keynote Lecture at the 2019 Nong Nooch Cycad Horticulture Workshop

STARTED IN 1954 AS A FRUIT PLANTATION, the 600 acre Nong Nooch Tropical Botanic Garden in Chonburi Province, Thailand, has become a premier botanic garden dedicated to “preservation, research and conservation,” housing one of the most important cycad collections in the world. The garden has an amusement park feel to target a diverse variety of visitors. Within the dazzle, the owner, Kampon Tansacha, has amassed an extraordinary collection of plants and admits to being personally inspired and influenced by a visit to Lotusland for the mass plantings and dramatic display of his collections.

Every three years the Thai garden hosts the Nong Nooch Cycad Horticulture Workshop, focusing on cycad cultivation and propagation, which is increasingly important as more cycads become extinct in the wild and only exist in gardens. In fact, cycads are the most threatened plant group on the planet. With travel costs supported by the funds raised during *Lotusland Celebrates*, it was an honor to present the work we do at Lotusland to the international plant community with the keynote presentation at the conference last October. My presentation provided an overview of the cycad collection at Lotusland including its history, major renovations that have taken place, our sustainable horticulture and curatorial practices, the collection as it is now and I spoke about some of our projects focused on cycad conservation. Other presenters were from Thailand, South Africa, Australia, Europe and the United States with varied topics that focused on such things as effective propagation methods, both vegetative and by seed, the effects of environmental variables on cycads in cultivation, pollen storage techniques, how to successfully move large, mature cycads and many other subjects.

During the conference the days were filled with field trips to some of the impressive Nong Nooch nurseries, which are hundreds of acres in area, along with visiting some plants in habitat and touring the collections at the botanic garden. A short post conference tour afforded us the opportunity to experience some amazing cycads in the wild. Six different cycad species were seen in habitat – *Cycas elephantipes*, *C. siamensis*, *C. petraea*, *C. simplicipinna*, *C. nongnoochiae* and *C. tansachana*. Most plants were found growing on very sharp limestone outcroppings with a host of other plants from wild bananas and gingers to succulent euphorbias and dracaenas.

The 2019 workshop and post conference tour were invaluable learning opportunities and served to build and coordinate future collaborations with international institutions working towards a common goal of protecting cycad species against future extinctions. — *Paul Mills, Curator of the Living Collections*

TOP: An immense plant of *Cycas tansachana* on top of a limestone mountain.

MIDDLE: Nong Nooch Cycad Horticulture Workshop attendees.

BOTTOM: Life size dinosaur statues are placed throughout the garden to entertain guests.

