

A Great Wealth of Palms

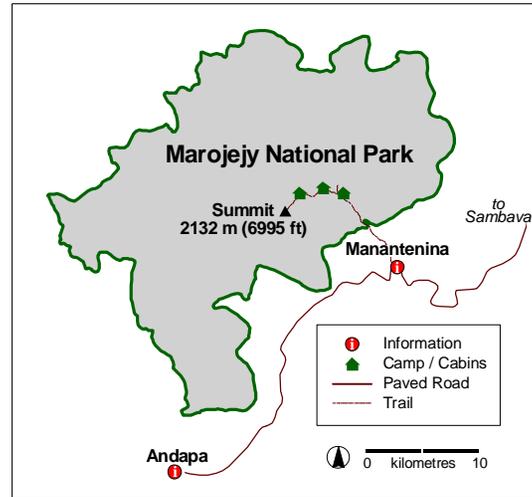
The Marojejy Massif rises abruptly, 2132 m (6995 ft) above the Indian Ocean in the northern portion of Madagascar's eastern escarpment. Warm, humid air blowing off the ocean supplies heavy rainfall to these rugged mountain slopes, and has created one of the island's most spectacular montane forests. Marojejy National Park protects this mountain and its forests, and all the natural wonders they contain.

Because of its high relief, high precipitation, and extensive forest cover, Marojejy provides a wide variety of habitats that are ideal for the growth of palms. Of the 170 species of palms known to exist on Madagascar, 35 (21%) grow in or around Marojejy. All but three of these palms are endemic to Madagascar, and seven (20%) of them are endemic to Marojejy.

Palms are found at all elevations in Marojejy. Especially palm rich are the mid-altitude forests between 700 and 1200 m, which provide excellent habitat for large litter-trapping species such as the impressive *Marojejya insignis*, as well as steep slopes for the more graceful, taller palms such as *Dypsis baronii*. Smaller, understory palms found in these mid-altitude forests include *D. lokohoensis*, *D. thiryana*, and the rare *D. cookei*. Growing at the very high elevations are miniature palms such as the wind-dwarfed *D. bonsai*, and *D. pumila*, which thrives in bogs above 2000 m.

Over seventy percent of the palm species found in Marojejy have been classified as rare, vulnerable, or endangered. Many species have extremely limited distributions and startlingly low population numbers; one species (*Dypsis ceracea*) has not been seen since 1949 and may now in fact be extinct. Threats to palms include habitat destruction, fire, harvesting for palm heart, and plant and seed collection by palm enthusiasts. Many populations are protected in parks and reserves such as Marojejy, but others are not. Fortunately, the Malagasy government has recently pledged to triple the size of its protected area network to approximately 6 million hectares (15 million acres). This, together with continuing environmental education programs, will help curb the loss of one of Madagascar's most precious resources — its great wealth of palms.

Access: Access into Marojejy National Park is via trail starting from the village of Manantenina, 60 km from Sambava along the road to Andapa. A permit and guide are required for entry; these are available at the Visitor Center in Manantenina or at the Park Headquarters office in Andapa.



Facilities: Three beautifully-sited and well-maintained camps are available at different elevations along the trail within the park. The camps all have cabins equipped with beds and bedding, as well as covered cooking and dining areas. Tent camping is also possible at several locations in the park.

Seasons: The park is open year-round, but the best times to visit are from April to May and September to December, when it is less rainy.

Surrounding Area: Northeastern Madagascar contains a number of other beautiful and biologically-interesting areas, including Masoala National Park, Nosy Mangabe and Anjanaharibe-Sud Special Reserves, and the Antalaha–Cap Est coastline.

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The Palms of Marojejy



Dypsis pumila

photo: Eric Mathieu

Marojejy National Park Madagascar



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Palm Species Found in and Around Marojejy National Park, Madagascar



N°	Scientific Name	Elevation	Distribution in Madagascar	Conservation Status
1	<i>Dypsis acuminum</i>	700–1900 m	Limited to 2 areas in N	Uncertain (dist. not well known)
2	<i>Dypsis andapae</i>	850–1400 m	Limited to 2 areas in NE	Rare
3	<i>Dypsis andrianatonga</i>	700–1800 m	Limited to 2 areas in N	Rare
4	<i>Dypsis baronii</i>	850–1470 m	Widespread in N, Central, and E	Not threatened
5	<i>Dypsis bonsai</i>	1000–1700 m	Limited to 2 areas in NE; total number of individuals possibly < 300	Vulnerable
6	<i>Dypsis catatiana</i>	450–1900 m	Widespread and common in NE and E	Not threatened
7	<i>Dypsis ceracea</i>	450 m	Limited to 2 widely separated sites in E; not seen since 1949	Extinct?
8	<i>Dypsis cookei</i>	1100 m	Marojejy only ; single population containing < 20 plants	Endangered
9	<i>Dypsis coursii</i>	900–1850 m	Marojejy only	Vulnerable
10	<i>Dypsis fasciculata</i>	5–225 m	Widespread in NE, but habitats vulnerable to destruction by fire	Vulnerable
11	<i>Dypsis heteromorpha</i>	1300–2200 m	Limited to 3 areas in NE; not seen since 1959	Uncertain, but probably rare
12	<i>Dypsis heterophylla</i>	550–1450 m	Widespread in N and E, but never common	Rare
13	<i>Dypsis lastelliana</i>	< 450 m	Widespread in N and E	Not threatened
14	<i>Dypsis lokohoensis</i>	400–1200 m	Marojejy only	Vulnerable
15	<i>Dypsis marojejyi</i>	700–1100 m	Marojejy only	Vulnerable
16	<i>Dypsis mirabilis</i>	90–200 m	Marojejy only ; distribution area is very small, with few individuals	Endangered
17	<i>Dypsis occidentalis</i>	450–1400 m	Limited to 3 areas in N	Uncertain (dist. not well known)
18	<i>Dypsis onilahensis</i>	50–300 m	Widespread in NW, W, and South-Central, but total number of plants < 1000	Vulnerable
19	<i>Dypsis oreophila</i>	500–1700 m	Limited to 4 areas in NE	Vulnerable
20	<i>Dypsis perrieri</i>	150–800 m	Limited to 3 areas in NE	Vulnerable
21	<i>Dypsis pilulifera</i>	750–950 m	Limited to 3 areas in N and E	Vulnerable
22	<i>Dypsis pinnatifrons</i>	< 1000 m	Widespread and common in N and E	Not threatened
23	<i>Dypsis pumila</i>	1500–2100 m	Marojejy only	Vulnerable
24	<i>Dypsis spicata</i>	850–1000 m	Marojejy only	Rare
25	<i>Dypsis thiryana</i>	220–900 m	Widespread in N and E, but never common	Rare
26	<i>Dypsis tsaravoasira</i>	275–1050 m	Limited to 3 areas in NE; population numbers very low (possibly < 30 plants total)	Endangered
27	<i>Marojejya insignis</i>	350–1150 m	Widespread in E, but not common (perhaps < 2000 individuals total)	Vulnerable
28	<i>Masoala madagascariensis</i>	200–420 m	Limited to 3 areas in NE	Vulnerable
29	<i>Ravenea dransfieldii</i>	425–1700 m	Limited to 4 widely separated sites in E, with low population numbers at each site	Vulnerable
30	<i>Ravenea nana</i>	1100–1900 m	Limited to 3 widely separated areas in E; not seen since 1963	Endangered
31	<i>Ravenea robustior</i>	< 2000 m	Widespread in NW, E, and SE, but never common	Rare
32	<i>Ravenea sambiranensis</i>	< 2000 m	Widespread in NW, W, and E, but never common	Vulnerable
33	<i>Cocos nucifera</i>	lowlands	Widespread; introduced from Indomalaysia (coconut palm)	Not threatened
34	<i>Elaeis guineensis</i>	< 500 m	Widespread; probably introduced from Africa (oil palm)	Not threatened
35	<i>Raphia farinifera</i>	50–1000 m	Widespread; probably introduced from Africa (raffia palm)	Not threatened

Source: Dransfield, J., and Beentje, H., 1995. *The Palms of Madagascar*. Royal Botanic Gardens Kew and the International Palm Society, Kew, Great Britain.

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