

Review Article

TROPICAL PALMS AND FACTORS INFLUENCING THEIR DISTRIBUTIONS AND DIVERSITY, WITH A FOCUS ON *Pinanga* DIVERSITY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Mohamad Farid Abdullah¹, Salwana Md Jaafar², Norhayati Ahmad^{1,2}, Rahayu Sukmaria Sukri²

¹Environmental and Life Sciences Program, Faculty of Science, Universiti Brunei Darussalam, Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei Darussalam.

²Institute for Biodiversity and Environmental Research, Universiti Brunei Darussalam, Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei Darussalam

ARTICLE HIGHLIGHTS

- The palm genus *Pinanga* is the most diverse in Southeast Asia.
- Limited ecological studies on *Pinanga* show the influence of environmental factors.
- High *Pinanga* endemism in Borneo requires conservation action.

ABSTRACT

Palms represent some of the keystone species in tropical forests, providing numerous ecosystem services. They are widely studied by botanists because of their iconic and majestic appearance, although ecological studies of palm abundance, distributions, and diversity have only recently begun to gain attention. The abundance and diversity of palms at different spatial scales can be influenced by various factors, such as climate, soil properties, hydrology, topography and forest structure; understanding these influences is essential for conservation. This review details four abiotic factors (climate, soil chemistry, hydrology and topography) and one biotic factor (forest structure) affecting palm distribution and diversity. The genus *Pinanga*, one of the most diverse genera of palms, is discussed in terms of its distribution and diversity in Southeast Asia. Ecological studies on *Pinanga* diversity in the region are examined, revealing the influence of micro- and macro-scale variation in environmental factors, such as litter depth and thickness, canopy openness and crown cover, elevation, slope, aspect, light intensity, humidity and air temperature. The existing knowledge gaps on *Pinanga* ecology in Southeast Asia are discussed, and the need for more studies on population structures, functional traits and determinants of *Pinanga* diversity and distributions within different lowland forest types in the region are highlighted. The high endemism shown by *Pinanga* necessitates a more comprehensive ecological understanding of this genus to better inform its conservation and protection.

Keywords:

borneo, environmental factors, monocots, palmae, plant distributions

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*Corresponding author, e-mail:

rahayu.sukri@ubd.edu.bn

INTRODUCTION

Palms (Arecaceae or Palmae) are among the most abundant and important plant life in tropical rainforests (Dransfield *et al.* 2008; Browne & Karubian 2016; Elias *et al.* 2019). They represent one of the oldest surviving monocot families, maintaining their presence in tropical rainforest-like biomes over geological timespans (Renninger & Phillips 2016). Palms occur in tropical and subtropical regions worldwide and are found in a wide range of ecosystem types, including rainforests, montane regions, dry forests, savannas and desert oases

(Martins *et al.* 2014; Abdo 2017). In tropical forests, palms are remarkably majestic and can form either dense monodominant palm communities or species-rich communities with many forms of growth (Thonhofer *et al.* 2015; Elias *et al.* 2016; Balslev *et al.* 2016; Mehmud & Roy 2021). Palms display a variety of growth forms, including small shrubs, lianas and large trees (Muscarella *et al.* 2020). It is estimated that 40% of palm species are capable of growing stems of at least 10 cm diameter at 1.3 m above the ground (Kissling *et al.* 2019). Palms can take the form of tall trees entirely by primary growth because they lack secondary growth and vascular

cambium (Goodman *et al.* 2013). Some palm trees form thick and shallow root systems that provide better support than those of deep-rooted palm trees (Muscarella *et al.* 2020).

Palms are important to tropical ecosystems because they offer various ecosystem services (Cámara-Leret *et al.* 2017a; Levis *et al.* 2017; Muscarella *et al.* 2020; Montoya *et al.* 2021) and play an important role in forest structure and function (Boukili & Chazdon 2017). Within tropical ecosystems, palms are notable for their high biomass, effects on plant recruitment, interactions with other plants as well as dispersers, and pollinator and nutrient turnover (Montúfar *et al.* 2011; Sørensen 2012). Palms are often considered keystone species in tropical forests due to the dependence of many animals on their flowers and fruits for food (Onstein *et al.* 2017; Macedo-Santana *et al.* 2021). Palms have also functioned as a model system for geographical ecology and rainforest evolution (Kissling *et al.* 2012).

With more than 2,500 recognized species in 183 genera worldwide, palms are one of the most diverse groups of plants (Eiserhardt *et al.* 2011; Baker & Couvreur 2012; Kissling *et al.* 2012; Gödel *et al.* 2015; Baker & Dransfield 2016; Cámara-Leret *et al.* 2017a; Levis *et al.* 2017; Muscarella *et al.* 2020). Palms are common and characteristic elements of tropical forests across the equatorial region (Dransfield *et al.* 2008; Svenning *et al.* 2008; Baker & Couvreur 2013; Reichgelt *et al.* 2018; Bogota-Angel *et al.* 2021). Palm diversity is the highest in tropical Asia, followed by the Americas and Africa (Blach-Overgaard *et al.* 2010; Muscarella *et al.* 2020). Approximately half of all palm species (c. 1,200 species in 57 genera) have been recorded in tropical Asia, most of which are found in Malesia, with almost 1,000 species in 50 genera (Dransfield *et al.* 2008; Renninger & Phillips 2016). Although Malesia is known as the greatest palm diversity hotspot, there is a differentiation in species richness and distribution patterns across the region (Baker & Couvreur 2012). High palm species richness was recorded in both western (302 species in Borneo, 162 species in the Philippines) and eastern Malesia (243 species in New Guinea; Baker & Couvreur 2012). In contrast, lower species richness has been recorded in Wallacea, which comprises Sulawesi, the Moluccas and the Lesser Sunda Islands, with estimates of at least 62, 40 and 6 species, respectively (Baker & Couvreur 2012).

Palm abundance and diversity can have significant effects on tropical forest ecosystem functions as well as carbon sequestration (Muscarella *et al.* 2020). Palms are widely accepted as suitable model organisms for understanding the influence of high tropical biodiversity and geographical variation (Eiserhardt *et al.* 2011; Couvreur & Baker 2013). Therefore, understanding the diversity, distribution and dispersal of palms is integral to their conservation (Dransfield *et al.* 2008; Eiserhardt *et al.* 2011; Bacon *et al.* 2013; Abdo 2017). However, quantitative analyses of the distribution patterns and factors associated with palm abundance and diversity are still lacking (Muscarella *et al.* 2020). Among the palms, the genus *Pinanga* is one of the most diverse (Govaerts *et al.* 2020) and has recently been gaining attention in scientific studies (Mooney 2020; Haji Ramlan 2020; Abdullah 2021). This review focuses on the factors influencing palm abundance and species diversity, as well as the diversity of *Pinanga* palms in Southeast Asia.

FACTORS INFLUENCING PALM ABUNDANCE AND SPECIES DIVERSITY

Global patterns in palm distributions are mainly limited by low temperatures (Moraes *et al.* 2014). An increase in temperature can extend palm distributions to higher elevations where precipitation can then exert a significant positive effect on palm species richness (Renninger & Phillips 2016). Several studies have reported that palm abundance and species richness are strongly correlated with environmental factors (Kahn 1987; Cintra *et al.* 2005; Eiserhardt *et al.* 2011; Kristiansen *et al.* 2011; Manggat 2012; Emilio *et al.* 2014; Scariot 2015; Benchimol *et al.* 2017; Elias *et al.* 2019), and palm species distributions on continental and regional scales are associated with changes in climate, soil properties and dispersal (Blach-Overgaard *et al.* 2010). At smaller scales, palm distributions are associated with topography, hydrology, vegetation structure, species interactions and dispersal, but the relative importance of these factors differs between studies (Vormisto *et al.* 2004; Blach-Overgaard *et al.* 2010; Eiserhardt *et al.* 2011; Sørensen 2012; Alvaro-Segura *et al.* 2012). Here, we review four abiotic factors (climate, soil chemistry, hydrology and topography) and one biotic factor (forest structure) that influence palm abundance and species diversity (Eiserhardt *et al.* 2011).

Climate

Palm species distribution studies have primarily focused on the role of the environment, with climate often regarded as the main range-limiting factor, especially at large spatial scales (Blach-Overgaard *et al.* 2010). Climate plays a crucial role in global palm distribution (Muscarella *et al.* 2020; Bogota-Angel *et al.* 2021), and the distribution of individual palm species and patterns of palm species richness and diversity across different vegetation types are strongly associated with climate (Svenning *et al.* 2008; Eiserhardt *et al.* 2011; Sevegnani *et al.* 2016). Previous studies also observed that climate is important in determining plant distribution and diversity (Pearson & Dawson 2003; Kreft & Jetz 2007). Palm diversity hotspots, such as the Sunda region, offer beneficial conditions for diversification in palms due to the prolonged periods of climatic stability, while poor palm diversity can be observed in the Lesser Sunda Islands due to their moderately dry, seasonal climate (Baker & Couvreur 2012).

Palm diversity is strongly correlated with climatic factors, especially water (Bjorholm *et al.* 2005), with precipitation having the strongest positive effect on palm species richness (Renniger & Philips 2016). Similarly, climate has the greatest influence on the distributions of palms, which appear to be more significantly influenced by water-related variables than by temperature (Blach-Overgaard *et al.* 2010; Sørensen 2012). Additionally, palm species richness is influenced by annual precipitation or the number of wet days (Sørensen 2012). This supports a broad-scale study of species richness conducted by Hawkins *et al.* (2003), who concluded that water-related factors, such as rainfall and precipitation, are excellent drivers of plant richness in tropical and subtropical areas. Blach-Overgaard *et al.* (2010) concluded that climate was more important than habitat and human impact in determining the distribution of 25 out of 29 African palm species, with most of the palm species studied preferring humid climates, and few being influenced by temperature. In addition, palm species distributions within subtropical and temperate regions are often restricted due to low temperatures (Gatti *et al.* 2008). Therefore, palms are most diverse in warm and humid regions (Eiserhardt *et al.* 2011).

Studies focusing on the influence of climatic variables on palm species richness and diversity are limited (Dransfield *et al.* 2008), with the influence

of climatic factors on palm species distributions within tropical regions evaluated for African palms only (Blach-Overgaard *et al.* 2010). Temperature seasonality has been observed to limit palm distributions and emphasizes climate as the main range determinant at large spatial scales (Pearson & Dawson 2003). However, it is increasingly understood that palm species distributions are sensitive to climate at multiple spatial scales (Blach-Overgaard *et al.* 2010), and therefore, more studies at both local and global scales are recommended (Eiserhardt *et al.* 2011).

Soil Properties

Most tropical plant species show strong associations with edaphic conditions, and soil fertility can influence tree community composition (John *et al.* 2007; Sukri *et al.* 2012). Palms also show habitat associations governed by soil properties (Vormisto *et al.* 2004; Andersen *et al.* 2010; Viana *et al.* 2021). Soil fertility is the second most important abiotic factor influencing palm species richness (Bjorholm *et al.* 2006). For example, the diversity of palm subfamilies Arecoideae and Calamoideae tends to increase with increasing soil fertility (Bjorholm *et al.* 2006). Similarly, the link between soil properties and palm community composition in lowland rainforests is well studied (Vormisto *et al.* 2004; Andersen *et al.* 2010), and palm community compositions are linked with soil properties, such as exchangeable base concentration, aluminum concentration and soil texture (Cámara-Leret *et al.* 2017b).

Studies have shown that soil chemistry can affect palms species' abundance and richness (Ruokolainen & Vormisto 2000; Svenning 2001; Bjorholm *et al.* 2006; Poulsen *et al.* 2006; Eiserhardt *et al.* 2011; Muscarella *et al.* 2020). The distribution and abundance of several tropical American palm species are correlated with soil factors, such as nutrient concentrations, aluminum content and clay (Svenning 2001). Palm species in the western Amazon prefer either nutrient-poor or nutrient-rich soils (Ruokolainen & Vormisto 2000), and the composition of Amazon palm communities is significantly correlated with soil chemical properties, such as exchangeable cations and aluminum content (Poulsen *et al.* 2006; Dalling *et al.* 2016; Viana *et al.* 2021). Macronutrients, such as exchangeable bases (calcium, potassium and magnesium) and phosphorus, were found to influence species abundances in palm communities in non-flooded Amazonian forests more

significantly than micronutrients did (Cámara *et al.* 2017b). Similarly, exchangeable bases, phosphorus and nitrogen concentrations have been linked to the distribution of palms in various lowland tropical rainforests (Andersen *et al.* 2010; Baribault *et al.* 2012; Condit *et al.* 2013). Soil bulk density can also influence the composition of palm communities (Andersen *et al.* 2010; Viana *et al.* 2021), and palms can show variation across gradients of soil nutrient availability (Viana *et al.* 2021). Palm species composition can also vary with soil texture on local scales, likely due to a soil texture correlation with drainage (Kristiansen *et al.* 2012; Sørensen 2012).

In contrast, some studies have also found that differences in soil properties may not be important in influencing individual palm species' distributions at continental scales, and not all studies support a significant role for soil fertility in palm community turnover (Normand *et al.* 2006; Blach-Overgaard *et al.* 2010). Therefore, the strength of soil effects on palm community composition is variable and may depend on the spatial scale, ecosystem and habitat (Eiserhardt *et al.* 2011; Viana *et al.* 2021). Moreover, soil chemistry often interrelates with other environmental factors, such as topography, hydrology and vegetation structure, which requires further study (Eiserhardt *et al.* 2011).

Hydrology

Plant species distributions and diversity are also affected by hydrology, particularly through flooding and drainage (Eiserhardt *et al.* 2011). As precipitation is one of the most important predictors of palm species richness (Kissling *et al.* 2012), this correlates with a higher abundance of palms in continually wet sites (Viana *et al.* 2021). The importance of hydrology for palm species distribution has been well demonstrated for Amazonian palms (Kahn 1987). Several studies have assessed the effects of flooding and drainage on the distribution and abundance of individual palm species (Svenning 2001; Montúfar & Pintaud 2006). Most palms are linked with either well-drained or poorly-drained soils (Henderson *et al.* 2019), while some palm species prefer swampy areas (Dransfield *et al.* 2008). For instance, most of the African palms occupy humid rainforests or swamplands, and are often in the riparian zone or areas where the water table is locally high, while very few species are found in dry and open habitats, such as savannas or deserts (Blach-Overgaard *et al.* 2010). Palm species abundance in French

Guiana is correlated with a change in soil drainage along topographic transitions (Salm *et al.* 2015). Additionally, Salm *et al.* (2015) found that the abundance of the six most common palm species was correlated with humidity gradients from floodplains to terra firme, with palm distribution from the most flood-tolerant to the least flood-tolerant palm species.

Differences in soil moisture and drainage have been shown to affect palms individually (Svenning 2001). For example, five out of 23 palms responded individually to poor drainage in the Amazonian terra firme forest (Svenning 1999). Significant differences in palm community composition between well-drained and poorly-drained soils have been recorded (Balslev *et al.* 1987; Kahn 1987; Normand *et al.* 2006). For instance, palms in the terra firme (dry land) consisted of 17% of individuals and 11% of the basal area, compared with 30% of individuals and 19% of the basal area in the floodplain forest in Ecuador (Balslev *et al.* 1987). Palm species richness in seasonally flooded land and terra firme forests in the Amazon basin was found to be three times higher on well-drained soils (terra firme) than on seasonally flooded soils (Kahn & de Castro 1985). Similarly, in the western Amazon, higher species richness was recorded for palm communities in terra firme forests than in wetland forests (Eiserhardt *et al.* 2011), and in Ecuador, palm species were found to be significantly more abundant in terra firme forests than in floodplain forests (Balslev *et al.* 1987). Although flooding and drainage have strong effects on palm distribution on local to landscape scales, as well as on palm species richness on a landscape scale (Eiserhardt *et al.* 2011), the degree to which these effects are influenced by other factors, such as vegetation structure and light availability, requires further investigation (Svenning 2000).

Topography

Topography strongly affects the distribution of tropical plant species (Sukri *et al.* 2012; Wang *et al.* 2015; Limin *et al.* 2022) and is known as a key influencing factor for vegetation patterns at the landscape and regional scales (Sanders & Rahbek 2012; Moeslund *et al.* 2013). Plant species diversity is often related to topographic heterogeneity at broader scales (Kreft & Jetz 2007). Topography indirectly affects plant distributions by regulating other abiotic factors, such as soil conditions, wind exposure, hydrology, temperature, climate and forest structure (Svenning 2001; Balslev *et al.* 2011; Eiserhardt *et al.* 2011; Lueder 2020).

Palm species abundance, richness and composition have a significant relationship with altitude (Rodrigues *et al.* 2014). Palms decrease in abundance with increasing soil moisture and decreasing elevation, indicating that elevation and soil moisture influence palm community patterns (Bonetti *et al.* 2017; Lueder 2020). Kreft *et al.* (2006) found that rare palm species were more strongly influenced by topographic complexity, while climatic factors were strongly correlated with species richness for widespread species. At landscape scales, topography shows a correlation with palm abundance (Eiserhardt *et al.* 2011). For instance, the abundance of canopy palms in Costa Rica and wet Amazonian forests was the highest on crests and steep slopes than at lower altitudes (Kahn 1987). In a seasonally dry forest in southern Amazonia, palm abundance decreased with elevation (Salm *et al.* 2007), while in Costa Rica, palms are abundant at lower elevations (approx. 2,500 m altitude; Lieberman *et al.* 1996). Eiserhardt *et al.* (2011) suggested that high palm abundance in steep and rugged terrain was due to a high number of canopy gaps that were favorable for palm recruitment, while the lower abundance of palms on steep slopes compared with crests may be due to the high water overflow causing those sites to be extremely dry for palms (Kahn 1987). Additionally, Salm *et al.* (2007) showed that the high abundance of palms in low-lying areas was due to high moisture availability. At a local scale, palm species abundance differed independently of topographic position in both Amazonian lowland rainforests and seasonally dry forests (Kahn 1987; Salm *et al.* 2007). In Amazonian Ecuador, 10 out of 23 palm species were related to specific topographic positions, while altitude and inclination tended to be less important; the opposite pattern was seen in the wet lower montane forest in Ecuador, where altitude and aspect strongly influence palm species distributions (Svenning 1999, 2001).

In terms of species richness, both palm species richness and genus richness decrease significantly with elevation in New Guinea and its adjacent islands (Bachman *et al.* 2004). However, topography may be less influential on palm species richness at a continental scale in the Americas (Bjorholm *et al.* 2005; Kreft *et al.* 2006). On a landscape scale, palm species richness tends to decline with elevation in the Amazon rainforest (Salm *et al.* 2007) and along an altitudinal transect in Costa Rica (Lieberman *et al.* 1996). In contrast, Poulsen *et al.* (2006) found that the species richness of palms

was the highest at the highest elevations in terra firme Amazonian rainforest. Overall, topography is important at local scales but may be less important in influencing palm species richness at broader spatial scales (Bjorholm *et al.* 2005; Kristiansen *et al.* 2011). Topography only influences palm species distributions and community composition indirectly; thus, its effects will vary for local scale differences depending on the geographical features of each location (Vormisto *et al.* 2004). It is also suggested that the relationship between diversity and elevation depends fundamentally on the interaction of environmental variables (Rahardjo 2020). Consequently, it is important to measure other environmental factors, such as soil water availability, soil nutrient conditions, hydrology, wind exposure and light availability, which are factors that directly underlie topographic gradients (Svenning 2001; Eiserhardt *et al.* 2011), and to determine how topographic variables can influence the population dynamics of palms (Pasion *et al.* 2022).

Forest Structure

Forest structure reflects the role of plants and specific trees as ecosystem engineers that can influence environmental factors, such as light availability and litter fall (Svenning 2001). The surrounding vegetation and canopy gaps can influence microclimate and light availability (Carson & Schnitzer 2011), and light influences species distribution through competition for light and through shade tolerances (Carson & Schnitzer 2011). In palm communities, several palm species favor an open canopy due to light availability (Eiserhardt *et al.* 2011). For example, rattan occurrence is positively correlated with the presence of treefall gaps (Siebert 2005). In addition, Svenning (2000) found that several palms prefer gaps and are distributed non-randomly with canopy openness. The importance of light on palms may differ between ontogenetic stages (Svenning 2001). Previous studies have suggested that large palms can reach the adult stage only in treefall gaps due to their light requirements increasing at the adult stage (Eiserhardt *et al.* 2011).

There are no strong relationships between canopy heterogeneity or light availability and palm community composition (Eiserhardt *et al.* 2011). For example, canopy openness and the presence of non-palm trees in Amazonian terra firme rainforest does not significantly influence palm species richness (Cintra *et al.* 2005).

However, the community composition of palms is associated with forest structure (Browne & Karubian 2016), where adult palm abundance and species richness tend to increase with canopy height, while juvenile abundance decreases with canopy openness. Juvenile species richness was also found to increase with distance to the forest edge and decrease with canopy openness (Browne & Karubian 2016). Hilário and Toledo (2016) observed that forests with taller and larger trees, a closed canopy and an open understory contain higher palm abundance. However, Eiserhardt *et al.* (2011) argued that the influence of vegetation structure on the species richness of palms may be weak, as only a few palm species respond to canopy openness or light availability, likely due to species-specific preferences.

GENUS *Pinanga*

The genus *Pinanga* Blume (1838) is a genus of palms in the family Arecaceae (Syauqina *et al.* 2017; Randi *et al.* 2019) and is one of the most diverse genera of palms (Govaerts *et al.* 2020). Arecaceae are persistent climbers, bushes and trees (Mainasara *et al.* 2019). The growth forms of *Pinanga* are varied, including shrubs and tree-like or stemless plants (Dransfield *et al.* 2008). The genus shows significant differences in morphological and quantitative characteristics, such as size, form, stem color, crown shaft, leaves and pollen (Randi *et al.* 2019). *Pinanga* palms can be distinguished from other palms by the entire margins of the blades of their leaves or leaflets, and by their inflorescences, flower arrangements and fruits (Ang *et al.* 2010). *Pinanga* can be found in a variety of habitats because each species typically prefers different environments (Dransfield 1980; Fernando *et al.* 2020). For example, *Pinanga simplicifrons* (Miq.) Becc. is found in shaded and swampy areas (Ang *et al.* 2010), while *Pinanga javana* Blume prefers hill slopes (Zulkarnaen *et al.* 2019). Some *Pinanga* species prefer higher elevations (Syahida-Emiza *et al.* 2018; Fernando *et al.* 2020).

Local communities often use *Pinanga* palms as tools and sources of food. For example, the stalk of *Pinanga auriculata* Becc. is used to make fish traps, while edible fruit from *Pinanga patula* Blume var. *microcarpa* Becc. can be eaten with betel (Haji Ramlan 2020). In Bali (Indonesia), *Pinanga arinasae* Witono (locally known as Nyabah or Jabah) leaves, fruits as well as stems are culturally important for Balinese people (Sutomo

et al. 2018). Local people mostly use *P. arinasae* for ornamental purposes (Syauqina *et al.* 2017; Sutomo *et al.* 2018), such as the production of traditional umbrellas called ‘Cukup’ from the *P. arinasae* leaf sheath (Sutomo *et al.* 2018). The extract from *Pinanga limosa* Ridl. may function as a potential anticancer agent, although its efficacy requires verification (Mainasara *et al.* 2019).

Distribution of *Pinanga* Species

Currently, a total of 145 species of *Pinanga* have been recorded worldwide (POWO 2024) and their distributions range from the Himalayas and South China to New Guinea, with high diversity at the Sunda Shelf, while they are poorly represented in Papuasia (Coode *et al.* 1996; Randi *et al.* 2019). Within Southeast Asian tropical rainforests, *Pinanga* typically displays prominent levels of endemism and high species diversity (Dransfield *et al.* 2008). The Southeast Asian region is the center of *Pinanga* diversity worldwide, with 140 species of *Pinanga* recorded (Govaerts *et al.* 2020; Zulkarnaen *et al.* 2022a). The highest *Pinanga* species richness has been recorded in Malaysia and Indonesia (61 and 49 species, respectively), while Cambodia and Laos are the least species-rich countries (1 species each; Fig. 1). No records of *Pinanga* species have been published to date for Timor-Leste. These differences in species richness of *Pinanga* in the Southeast Asian countries partly reflect the larger amounts of sampling effort and studies that have been conducted in Malaysia and Indonesia compared to countries, such as Cambodia, Laos and Timor-Leste.

As studies on palm communities have gained increasing attention in the past ten years, *Pinanga* palms have been discovered in various locations in Southeast Asia during this period (Ang *et al.* 2010; Loo *et al.* 2014; Syauqina *et al.* 2017; Randi *et al.* 2019; Fernando *et al.* 2020; Lim *et al.* 2022). In Singapore, Ang *et al.* (2010) rediscovered *P. simplicifrons*, which was widely regarded as nationally extinct in Singapore before this rediscovery. *P. simplicifrons* was also rediscovered near Lornie Trail at the edge of MacRitchie Reservoir, Singapore (Lim *et al.* 2022). These rediscoveries in specific localities have led to the assessment of *P. simplicifrons* as ‘critically endangered’ in Singapore (Ang *et al.* 2010; Loo *et al.* 2014; Lim *et al.* 2022), although it remains unassessed in the IUCN Red List (IUCN 2024). In Malaysia, the *Pinanga* genus was the third most dominant palm genera recorded in the Dered

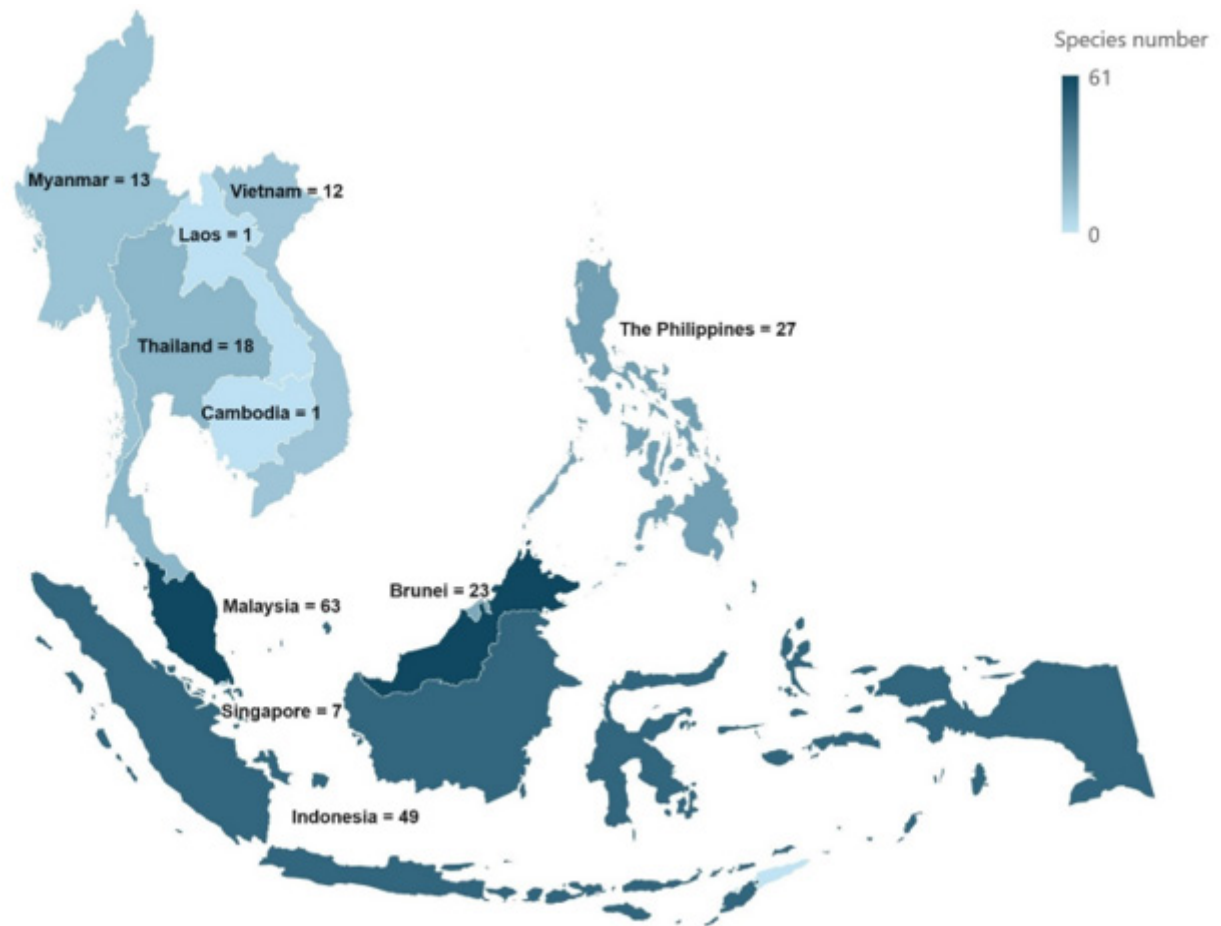


Figure 1 Variation in species richness of *Pinanga* across Southeast Asia

Notes: The total number of *Pinanga* species recorded in each country was compiled from Coode *et al.* (1996), Ang *et al.* (2010) and POWO (2024).

Krian National Park after the genera *Calamus* and *Daemonorops*, while *Pinanga chaiana* J.Dransf., *Pinanga crassipes* Becc. and *Pinanga jambusana* C.K.Lim were found scattered along trails in this national park (Syauqina *et al.* 2017). During an expedition to Long Banga, Sarawak, at least 11 palm species were found at higher ridges, including an unidentified species of *Pinanga* (Syahida-Emiza *et al.* 2018). In Indonesia, *P. arinasae* was found in the Pilan Forest in Bali (Wahyuni *et al.* 2017), although the species was previously suggested to be present only in Mt. Tapak Bedugul, Bali (Witono *et al.* 2002; Sutomo *et al.* 2018). *Pinanga schwanerensis* Randi, Hikmat & Heatubun was newly discovered in Kalimantan, growing on undulating grounds and steep slopes (Randi *et al.* 2019). *Pinanga lepidota* Rendle was rediscovered on Palawan Island in 2020, increasing the number of *Pinanga* species recorded in the Philippines to 27 (Fernando *et al.* 2020). In Vietnam, *Pinanga spiralis* A.J.Hend. & N.Q.Dung was discovered by Henderson and Dung (2017).

Within Borneo, a total of 41 species of *Pinanga* have been recorded (Table 1), mostly from Sarawak, Brunei Darussalam and Sabah (Odufuwa 2019; Govaerts *et al.* 2020; POWO 2024). Fewer records of *Pinanga* have been found in Kalimantan, Indonesian Borneo, despite the larger land area and greater habitat diversity (Randi *et al.* 2019; Odufuwa 2019). The higher species richness in Malaysian Borneo likely partly reflects greater sampling efforts compared to Kalimantan. Notably, despite having the smallest land area within Borneo, 23 species of *Pinanga* have been recorded in Brunei Darussalam. Almost all of the *Pinanga* species recorded in Borneo are endemic to the island (POWO 2024), with the exception of three species (*P. auriculata*, *P. patula* and *P. simplicifrons*).

Table 1 Checklist of *Pinanga* species recorded in Borneo

No.	Species	Brunei	Sabah	Sarawak	Kalimantan
1	<i>Pinanga albescens</i> Becc.		X	X	X
2	<i>Pinanga angustisecta</i> Becc.	X	X	X	
3	<i>Pinanga aristata</i> (Burret) J.Dransf.	X	X	X	X
4	<i>Pinanga arundinacea</i> Ridl.		X	X	
5	<i>Pinanga auriculata</i> Becc.	X	X	X	
6	<i>Pinanga borneensis</i> Scheff.	X	X	X	X
7	<i>Pinanga brevipes</i> Becc.	X	X	X	X
8	<i>Pinanga capitata</i> Becc.	X	X	X	X
9	<i>Pinanga chaiana</i> J.Dransf.	X	X	X	
10	<i>Pinanga crassipes</i> Becc.		X	X	
11	<i>Pinanga cucullata</i> J.Dransf.			X	
12	<i>Pinanga decora</i> L.Linden & Rodigas		X	X	
13	<i>Pinanga dumetosa</i> J.Dransf.	X	X	X	
14	<i>Pinanga gracillima</i> Merr.		X	X	
15	<i>Pinanga jambusana</i> C.K.Lim			X	
16	<i>Pinanga keahii</i> Furtado		X	X	X
17	<i>Pinanga lepidota</i> Rendle	X	X	X	X
18	<i>Pinanga ligulata</i> Becc.		X	X	X
19	<i>Pinanga limbangensis</i> C.K.Lim			X	
20	<i>Pinanga minuta</i> Furtado.	X	X	X	
21	<i>Pinanga mirabilis</i> Becc.	X	X	X	X
22	<i>Pinanga mooreana</i> J.Dransf.	X		X	
23	<i>Pinanga pachyphylla</i> J.Dransf.			X	
24	<i>Pinanga patula</i> Blume	X	X	X	X
25	<i>Pinanga pilosa</i> (Burret) J.Dransf.		X	X	
26	<i>Pinanga ridleyana</i> Becc.	X	X	X	X
27	<i>Pinanga rivularis</i> Becc.	X		X	
28	<i>Pinanga rupestris</i> J.Dransf.			X	
29	<i>Pinanga salicifolia</i> Blume	X	X	X	X
30	<i>Pinanga schwanerensis</i> Randi, Hikmat & Heatubun				X
31	<i>Pinanga sessilifolia</i> Furtado	X	X	X	X
32	<i>Pinanga simplicifrons</i> (Miq.) Becc.	X	X	X	X
33	<i>Pinanga stricta</i> Becc.		X	X	
34	<i>Pinanga subterranea</i> Randi & W.J.Baker			X	X
35	<i>Pinanga tenacinervis</i> J.Dransf.			X	
36	<i>Pinanga tenella</i> (H.Wendl.) Scheff.	X	X	X	X
37	<i>Pinanga tomentella</i> Becc.	X	X	X	X
38	<i>Pinanga trichoneura</i> Becc.		X	X	
39	<i>Pinanga variegata</i> Becc.	X	X	X	X
40	<i>Pinanga veitchii</i> H.Wendl. ex H.J.Veitch	X		X	
41	<i>Pinanga yassinii</i> J.Dransf.	X			
Total number of species		23	29	39	19

Notes: Presence of each palm species in a country or state in Borneo was indicated by an 'X'. All species are Bornean endemics, with the exception of three species highlighted in bold.

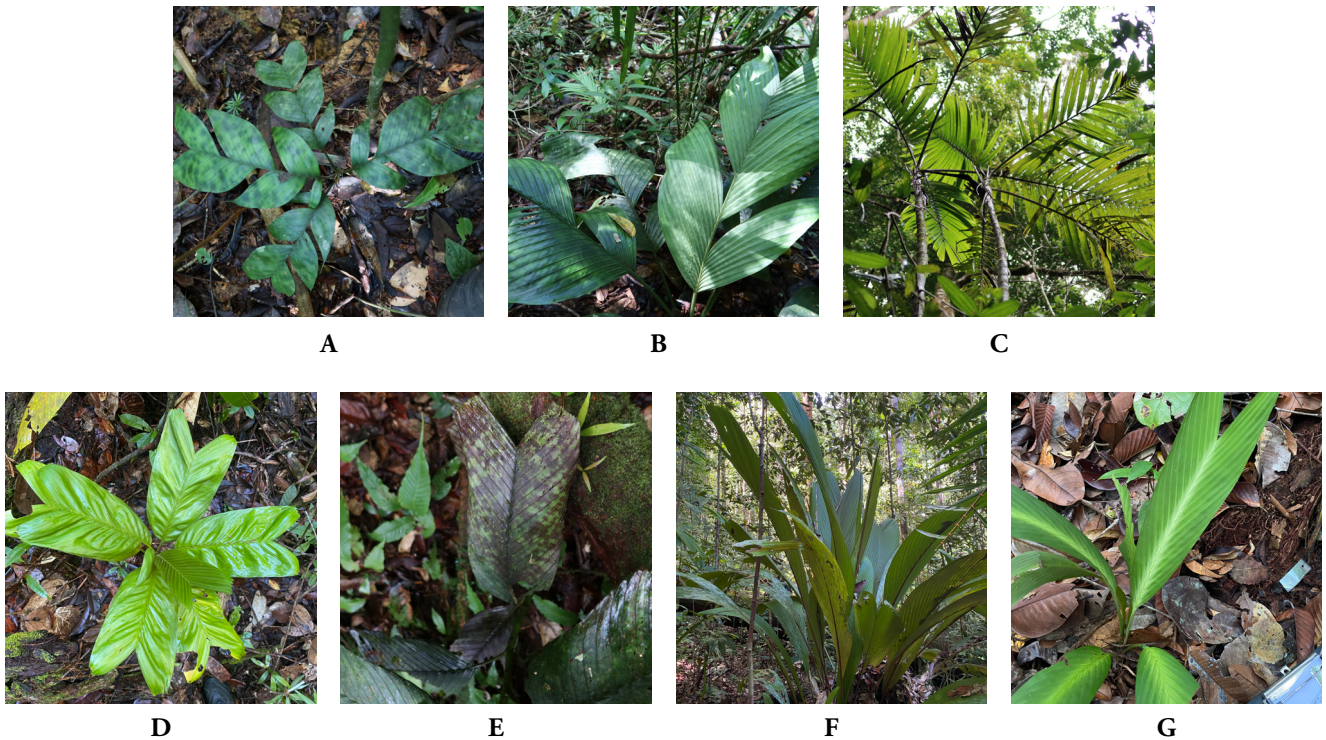


Figure 2 Selected *Pinanga* species found in Brunei Darussalam: A. *Pinanga aristata* (Burret) J.Dransf.; B. *Pinanga* aff. *brevipes* Becc.; C. *Pinanga mooreana* J.Dransf.; D. *Pinanga lepidota* Rendle; E. *Pinanga veitchii* H.Wendl. ex H.J.Veitch; F. *Pinanga mirabilis* Becc. and G. *Pinanga chaiana* J.Dransf.

Ecological Studies on *Pinanga* in Southeast Asia

In Southeast Asia, most published studies on *Pinanga* palms have focused on checklists and descriptive notes on the *Pinanga* species found within a country (Ang *et al.* 2010; Henderson *et al.* 2010; Adorador *et al.* 2020; Fernando *et al.* 2020). Despite increased attention on documenting *Pinanga* diversity within Southeast Asia, studies focusing on *Pinanga* ecology remain limited. Similarly to other palms, *Pinanga* distributions are often shaped by both micro- and macro-scale variation in environment. Within Southeast Asia, studies have shown the influence of a variety of environmental factors, such as litter depth and thickness, canopy openness and crown cover, elevation, slope, aspect, light intensity, humidity and air temperature (Syauqina *et al.* 2017; Astuti *et al.* 2018; Randi *et al.* 2019; Zulkarnaen *et al.* 2019, 2022a,b; Iryadi & Sutomo 2020; Yudaputra *et al.* 2021).

A study by Yudaputra *et al.* (2021) investigating the ecology of endemic *P. arinasae* in Bali showed that litter depth, canopy openness, elevation, slope and aspect were the most important environmental factors influencing this species' occurrence. In

addition, microclimatic conditions, such as light intensity, humidity and air temperature, were recorded as significant influencing factors, with light intensity considered the main factor influencing the distribution and abundance of *P. arinasae* (Iryadi & Sutomo 2020). Similarly, the population structure and habitat preferences of *P. javana* at Mt. Slamet (Central Java, Indonesia) were investigated (Zulkarnaen *et al.* 2019). The study showed that the population of *P. javana* was dominated by adult palms on the southern slope of Mt. Slamet and that slope, litter thickness and crown cover influenced the species' density. *Pinanga* palms are also frequently found in humid areas covered by high canopy cover, near small rivers and in soil with thick litter layers, as well as in limestone areas (Syauqina *et al.* 2017; Randi *et al.* 2019). Another study by Zulkarnaen *et al.* (2022b) found that Mt. Slamet was dominated by *P. javana* and *Pinanga coronata* Blume, with *P. javana* found above waterfall areas or on hill slopes. The growth of *P. javana* in Mt. Slamet appears to require specific abiotic factors, such as slope, litter thickness and canopy cover (Astuti *et al.* 2018). In contrast, *P. coronata* individuals were recorded under the heavy shade of the canopy (Zulkarnaen *et al.* 2022a). In Mt. Ungaran (Central Java), *P. javana* was found

to be strongly correlated with a stable and humid microclimate, similarly to the *P. javana* found in Mt. Slamet (Zulkarnaen *et al.* 2019, 2022b). This suggests that humidity levels can significantly influence *P. javana* populations. Furthermore, *P. javana* seems to prefer locations with steep to very steep slopes (Zulkarnaen *et al.* 2022a). In Kalimantan, Randi *et al.* (2019) found that *P. schwanerensis* grows on uneven terrain and slopes between 150-550 masl (meters above sea level), and prefers a humid area, high forest cover and thick leaf litter, as well as locations near streams. Other studies, such as those in the Philippines, Vietnam and Singapore, provide little information on the ecology of *Pinanga* palms, typically only including information on their altitude occurrences and locality (Ang *et al.* 2010; Henderson & Dung 2017; Fernando *et al.* 2020; Lim *et al.* 2022). For instance, on Palawan Island, *P. lepidota* is found in Dipterocarp forest at an elevation of 600 m, while *P. lepidota* in Borneo can be found up to an elevation of 1,500 m (Fernando *et al.* 2020). *P. spiralis* in Vietnam is found in lowland rainforests at elevations between 200-550 m (Henderson & Dung 2017). *P. simplicifrons* favors an open area caused by tree falls, and under high canopy cover (Lim *et al.* 2022), and can also survive in swampy areas with rich alluvial soil (Ang *et al.* 2010).

In Brunei Darussalam, a total of 23 species of *Pinanga* have been recorded (Fig. 2), and most of these were recorded in Ulu Temburong National Park (Coode *et al.* 1996; Haji Ramlan 2020). These *Pinanga* species are found in different habitats, from gentle to steep slopes, sandy to clay soil, and at various altitudes; additionally, most of the species are shrubs and are found near running streams (Coode *et al.* 1996). This indicates that *Pinanga* may have specific preferences for soil and environmental conditions.

Several recent studies have focused on the ecology of *Pinanga* palms in Brunei Darussalam. The distributions of *Pinanga* species in Brunei Darussalam are shaped by many factors, such as topographic positions, vegetation structure and soil properties. Shapcott *et al.* (2022) investigated the populations of five co-occurring *Pinanga* species at Kuala Belalong, Ulu Temburong, and found that the population sizes of most of these species were maintained 20 years later, with two species (*P. brevipes* and *P. aristata*) declining in overall abundance. They attributed the decline of understory *Pinanga* palms to the possible influence of climate

change due to increased rainfall fluctuations at Kuala Belalong (Shapcott *et al.* 2022). Also at Kuala Belalong, Mooney (2020) investigated the landscape distribution of *Pinanga* and concluded that one group of species (*P. mooreana* and *P. minuta*) was strongly associated with ridges, while a second group (*P. aristata*, *P. brevipes*, *P. dumetosa* and *P. veitchii*) was more strongly associated with valleys. The complex topography of the Kuala Belalong area (Sukri *et al.* 2012) appears to have created a range of microhabitats that enabled *Pinanga* species to coexist within the landscape. At two contrasting mixed Dipterocarp forest sites in Brunei Darussalam (Belalong and Teraja), Haji Ramlan (2020) recorded the influence of soil properties on *Pinanga* species richness, with higher *Pinanga* species richness recorded in Belalong due to higher concentrations of soil nutrients (total P, Mg, Ca, total and exchangeable K) and higher soil organic matter content, soil pH and soil gravimetric water content at this site. Abdullah (2024) recorded distinct *Pinanga* community composition between heath and mixed Dipterocarp forest types in Brunei Darussalam, with five *Pinanga* species (*P. aristata*, *P. chaiana*, *P. mooreana*, *P. variegata* var. *hallieriana* and *P. veitchii*) more strongly linked with the mixed Dipterocarp forest sites and two *Pinanga* species (*P. lepidota* and *P. salicifolia*) more strongly linked with the heath forest sites. Focusing specifically on the foliar nutrient content of *Pinanga* species, Abdullah (2021) examined its variation in three *Pinanga* species (*P. lepidota*, *P. mooreana* and *P. mirabilis*) with contrasting habitats and leaf formations. The study found that those foliar nutrient concentrations differed between the three *Pinanga* species and differed between different leaf formations of the same species. However, further investigations are required to relate the relationship between foliar nutrient concentrations and soil variables to further examine the ecology and habitat adaptations of these three *Pinanga* species.

Knowledge Gaps on *Pinanga* Ecology in Southeast Asia

Most studies of the genus *Pinanga* in Southeast Asia have focused on descriptive notes (Dransfield 1980; Coode *et al.* 1996; Witono *et al.* 2002; Zulkarnaen *et al.* 2019; Fernando *et al.* 2020). Although descriptive notes on *Pinanga* species are abundant (Dransfield 1980, 1991; Keat *et al.* 1998; Henderson *et al.* 2010; Fernando *et al.* 2020; Kuhnhäuser *et al.* 2023), these typically include

limited information, focusing on taxonomic descriptions and brief notes on, for example, locality and habitat.

Studies that focus on population structures of *Pinanga* species are still lacking, and to date, only two studies in Southeast Asia are known to have focused on this. In Indonesia, Yudaputra *et al.* (2021) studied the population structures of *P. arinasae* in Bali Island and found that the population comprised many seedlings, but a much lower abundance of juvenile and mature individuals. Meanwhile, Zulkarnaen *et al.* (2019, 2022a) studied the population structure of *P. javana* at two sites, Mt. Ungaran and Mt. Slamet, Java, Indonesia. They found that *P. javana* populations in Mt. Ungaran mainly comprised individuals at the seedling stage (Zulkarnaen *et al.* 2019), while those at Mt. Slamet mainly comprised adult individuals with stem heights of 6.1-8.1 m and stem diameters of 7-8.9 cm (Zulkarnaen *et al.* 2022a). In Brunei Darussalam, one of the first studies of *Pinanga* was done on five *Pinanga* species (*P. aristata*, *P. brevipes*, *P. dumetosa*, *Pinanga tenella* var. *tenella*, and *P. veitchii*) by Shapcott (1999). The study compared the population genetics and densities of these five *Pinanga* species at Kuala Belalong, Brunei, and showed that all species of *Pinanga* palms studied had quite prominent levels of genetic diversity, which were correlated with population density. Shapcott (1999) further reported that the densest species had less genetic variation than less-dense species, with *P. dumetosa* exhibiting the greatest gene flow between its populations and *P. brevipes* exhibiting the lowest. The lack of studies on *Pinanga* population structure in Southeast Asia underscores the need for increased ecological investigation into the populations of these species, particularly since the region holds the highest diversity of *Pinanga* species globally. Understanding the population biology of *Pinanga* species, particularly those that are endemic to Borneo, is of priority to better inform and design management plans and conservation efforts for these palms.

Although environmental factors and soil properties have been shown to influence palm communities at different spatial scales (Eiserhardt *et al.* 2011), their influence on *Pinanga* palm communities are only beginning to be understood. Descriptive notes provide anecdotal evidence to demonstrate that *Pinanga* species display habitat preferences (Dransfield 1980; Coode *et al.* 1996; Witono *et al.* 2002; Fernando *et al.* 2020), but the significant influence of environmental factors and

soil conditions still requires investigation. Although a few studies have statistically shown that *Pinanga* species appear to exhibit habitat specificity, these remain few and should be expanded to the various forest types that are known to occur throughout Borneo and in the wider Southeast Asian region. To complement investigations of drivers of *Pinanga* diversity in different forest types, an increased understanding of functional traits of *Pinanga* species, such as their growth forms, stem traits, fruit traits and leaf traits (Kissling *et al.* 2019), which could explain their habitat specificity, should also be aimed for.

It is notable that only three *Pinanga* species that are recorded as Bornean endemics have been assessed and listed in the IUCN Red List: *P. chaiana* (Near Threatened), *P. mooreana* (Least Concern) and *P. patula* (Least Concern) (IUCN 2024). *Pinanga* palms are often prized by illegal collectors and also face threats from deforestation and forest fragmentation (Bellot *et al.* 2022). The threats faced by *Pinanga* populations in Borneo and Southeast Asia highlight a need for more studies of these palms to guide the conservation management of this genus throughout the region.

CONCLUSION

It is widely accepted that palm abundance is influenced by various factors, such as climate, soil chemistry, hydrology, topography and vegetation structure. Currently available studies on the relationship between palm abundance and species richness are still lacking because not all determinants have been quantitatively studied at all scales and because some studies involved more comprehensive investigations than others. Palm species richness has been comprehensively studied only at a continental to global scale, and studies on community abundance are often conducted at local scales but less frequently at landscape to regional scales, being especially limited at a continental to global scale. Therefore, it is crucial to assess the relationship between palm abundance and species richness with biotic and abiotic factors at all spatial scales.

For *Pinanga* palms, there is still insufficient ecological understanding of the factors that act as determinants of their abundance and species richness. Studies to date have shown that *Pinanga* palms typically prefer humid conditions, thick litter layers, high canopy cover and locations near water sources, such as rivers or small streams. *Pinanga* species abundance and richness, as well as its foliar

contents, can be influenced by soil properties. Detailed studies focusing on different lowland forest types with contrasting environmental conditions, and on how these factors affect *Pinanga* species abundance and richness, coupled with studies investigating their functional traits, are needed. Several *Pinanga* species are endemic to Borneo, and this highlights the need to investigate their populations and habitat preferences, particularly for the conservation of these iconic palms.

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