

Agricultural, Economical and Ecological Importance of *Phoenix pusilla* (Ceylon Date Palm) and Its Future Research Perspectives

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Phoenix pusilla, commonly known as Ceylon date palm (Indi) is a native palm species to Sri Lanka, belonging to the Family *Arecaceae* and Genus *Phoenix*. It is closely related but distinct from *Phoenix dactylifera* (date palm) by many morphological features. *P.pusilla* grows naturally in many parts of Northern and Eastern regions in Sri Lanka, and occasionally raised as an ornamental crop. It is considered as an underutilized fruit crop, and an untouched genetic resource, facing a severe genetic loss due to the negligence of the public and lack of scientific research. The aim of the review was to study the existing knowledge on agricultural, economical and ecological importance of *P.pusilla*. An extensive literature search was carried out in "Google scholar", "NCBI" and "AGRIS" databases using search terms "Ceylon date palm" and "*P.pusilla*" which resulted total of seven research articles. One study depicted that it is a multipurpose plant with many valuable traits, but with an inconsiderable attention within the country and globally. Three research papers showed the importance of its edible fruit in treating fever, hyperdipsia, consumption, cardiac and general debility, burning sensation, seminal weakness, and gasteropathy. Furthermore, leaflets have been used to weave mats, brooms and baskets. It is ecologically important as a nursing plant in improving degraded tropical dry evergreen forest landscapes, by conserving soil and maintaining favorable conditions for the growth of woody plants. It is highly drought tolerant and has been used to pollinate *P.datylifera* which has produced commercially valuable dwarf hybrids bearing seedless, edible fruits. In conclusion, further studies are essential to understand the physiology of *P.pusilla* to biotic and abiotic stresses, its ecological adaptations, nutritional and medicinal properties and phylogenetic relationships for the development as a cash crop and to improve other *Phoenix* species through interspecies hybridization.

Keywords: Agriculture, Ecology, *Phoenix pusilla*, Underutilized crops