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| **TREE FACTS: MAGNIFICENT BLOOMS OF THE CENTURY PALM**http://www.starofmysore.com/image.asp?slno=9948&type=specialnewsCentury Palm’ or ‘Talipot Palm’ is one of the uncommon and distinctive trees found in Lalbagh Botanical Garden, Bengaluru and one of these trees is in full bloom now.When most of the flowering plants bloom during the season, what is so special or unique about this bloom? The tree flowers only once in its life time (30 to 80 years). Emerging from the centre of the cluster of fan-shaped leaves, the gigantic inflorescence (15 - 25 ft long) displays thousands of miniature creamy white flowers.Towering atop the canopy of surrounding trees the floral display is a majestic sight and is visible from a long distance. I consider it a rare sight to watch, a lifetime treat for any nature lover to see the massive flowering structure in its grandeur. Truly, it is a New Year bonanza for tree- lovers!‘Century Palm’ is a metaphorical allusion to a presumed 100-year life span and ‘Talipot’ is derived from Sanskrit ‘tâlî’ meaning ‘fan palm’ and ‘pattra’ alluding to ‘leaf.’ Botanically known as Corypha umbraculifera, the Talipot Palm is native to Eastern and Southern India and Sri Lanka. The generic name ‘Corypha’ is from the Greek word ‘koryphç’ (top) and the specific name ‘umbraculifera’ from the Latin ‘umbraculum’ (parasol) and the Greek ‘pherein’ (to bear).In Kannada it is known as ‘Srithale,’ ‘Beesanigemara’, ‘Kodethala’; ‘Kudaipanai’ in Tamil; Telugu: ‘Sritalam’; ‘Kudapana’ in Malayalam, ‘Talo’ in Odia; Hindi:’Bajarbattu.’The tree is wildly found in Yana, North Kanara on Western Ghats. It is also cultivated in some parts of Peninsular India. It needs moist climate and hence abundantly grows in moist coastal areas. Compared to other palms, Talipot is a gargantuan plant, being one of the largest palms reaching a height up to 25 m. It is monocarpic, which means the flowers are produced only once during the life span. The leaves are fan shaped and aptly termed ‘palmate’ leaves, soft, light coloured when dry and flexible. They are one of the largest leaf structures in plant world.The huge floral cluster, technically known as branched panicle, is positioned at the top end of the stem. The inflorescence stays on the tree for a long duration. Furthermore, it takes about a year for the fruit to mature, producing thousands of round, yellow-green fruit, each containing a single seed. The plant dies after completion of fruiting process but not before raining down thousands of golf ball-sized fruits.The tree is categorised as ‘threatened species’ by International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).Uses: The leaves are used for making hand fans, mats, umbrellas, baskets, thatching, roofing etc. In the past, the leaves (“ola or oley”) of this tree were known to be used in various Southeast Asian cultures to create traditional palm leaf manuscripts and for fortune-telling in Southern India and Sri Lanka.Tail-piece: One must visit to witness the Talipot palm’s spectacular floral display, a moment of glory! A must-see for students of Botany, naturalists and plant lovers. Carry a binocular to view the finer details of the blossom.Text & photographs by Dr. Mahadeswara Swamy, Scientist, Mob: 97429-91057 e-mail: swamy\_clri@hotmail.com |

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