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Churches begin to go green for Palm Sunday

2 April 2007:

It is a multi-million dollar business, it is threatening the world's forests and rare bird populations, it stems from a procession of peace... it is Palm Sunday, and churches around the world are beginning to do something about it.

Nearly a hundred million palm stems were purchased for - and gathered by - churches around the world yesterday to celebrate the day nearly 2000 years ago that Jesus was said to have come into Jerusalem, welcomed by a crowd who were waving palm branches in his honour.

US churches alone were estimated to have used between 25 and 35 million palms yesterday, according to a New York Times report.

The trouble is that this niche demand has led to some environmental crises throughout South and Central America, where local people have tended to pick the palms wild, without giving them time to regenerate. In Colombia the (world) population of wild green-eared parrots sank to around 80 five years ago, thanks to the depletion of the rare Qindio palm, 70 metres tall and delightfully wavy, which is the sole habitation of the species.

In Mexico similarly the demand for the xate palm has depleted the species in the forests of South Chiapas where they were once plentiful, causing problems for the fauna that live around them.

ARC has been working with [Pro-Natura Chiapas](#) and the Catholic Church in Mexico, and [Conservation International](#) has been working with the Colombian Catholics and local NGOs to try and change this - to make it so that a simple act of worship is not a thoughtless act.

It is already having a positive effect: the population of green-eared parrots today is over 600 and rising, and in Mexico's Chiapas forests wild palm fronds are now being protected. The eco palms project is employing farmers to cut good fronds, while allowing the plants to survive.

Yesterday, the [New York Times](#) reported that 1,436 churches in North America distributed 364,000 eco-palm stems and although this represented, only one percent of the total, the word was spreading.

"Slightly more expensive than the average palm, eco-palms are the rage in churches across the United States of America because of the social and environmental benefits they represent. They are collected in a way that helps preserve the forest, and more of the sale price ends up in the pockets of the people who cut them."

One of the problems is that the "eco palms" have shorter leaves than the rare palms, meaning that they are harder to fold into crosses. It is an adjustment that churches are just beginning to make.

The BBC World Service also featured the story on its Palm Sunday weekend edition of [Reporting Religion](#) including an interview with ARC's Paola Triolo. Link here for the audio edition. It comes in at the 23rd minute.



The BBC World Service featured the palm story on its [Reporting Religion](#) programme, including an interview with ARC's Paola Triolo. Link [here](#) for the audio edition, available until April 7. It comes in at the 23rd minute.

February 9 2007:
[CI works with Colombian Catholics to save parrot from extinction](#)

Five years ago, Conservation International and its partners forged a partnership with the Roman Catholic church in Colombia to save the yellow-eared parrot and the tall wax palm from almost guaranteed extinction. Today, the alliance is lauded as one of the most successful biodiversity conservation campaigns in Latin America - and the parrots and wax palms are multiplying

December 13, 2006:
[Pope tackles issues of ecology and energy use](#)

The Pope yesterday spoke out about how peace can only be attained by respecting the natural environment as well as the human environment.

[Projects overview](#)
A complete listing of all current ARC projects



[Links](#)

Link [here](#) for the Pro-Natura-ARC Sacred Orchids project, protecting sacred species by setting up sustainable growing programmes.

Link [here](#) for the CI project with parrots in Colombia.

Link here for the [Conservation International](#) website.

Link here for the [New York Times](#) report on eco-palms for Palm Sunday.

Link here for the [ProAves](#) website (in English).

Link here for the [ProAves](#) website (in Spanish).

Link here for another story about how Conservation International has worked with religions to preserve endangered species - this time with Hindu leaders to save the rare [seaturtles of Bali](#).

Link here for an article about the yellow-eared parrot from [the Parrot Society](#) website.

Link here to learn more about the yellow-eared parrot from [Birdlife International](#).

Link here for a photograph of the astonishingly tall [Ceroxylon Quindiuense](#) wax palm.

Link here for more information about the [endangered wax palm](#).

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