

Nypa fruticans Wurmb.

Nypa fruticans (nypa palm) is found in the upstream estuarine zone forming extensive stands along brackish to tidal freshwater creeks and rivers. It is fast growing especially in freshwater. The species ranges from Sri Lanka and the Ganges delta to the west Pacific.

The nypa palm was introduced to Nigeria from where it has spread to the Wouri estuary in Cameroon; it has been reported as naturalized in a botanic garden on Tahiti in French Polynesia; a small stand has been recorded near the port of Colon in Panama on the Atlantic side, and germinating beach stranded propagules of nypa palm have been collected in Trinidad and Tobago in 1998- most likely carried with ocean currents, originating from the West African populations.

Two separate introductions of *N. fruticans* were made to Nigeria one in 1906 to Calabar from a botanical garden in Singapore and a second introduction in 1946 of 6000+ seeds from Malaysia planted on the brackish swamps of the Niger Delta. *Nypa* is reported in four coastal states with an estimated 821 sq kms of area of occurrence; the slow spread of nypa has been recorded through the Niger, Imo, Bonny and Cross Rivers reaching the Wouri Estuary in Cameroon.

In the Niger Delta nypa invades deforested and exposed mudflats, fish nursery and feeding grounds forming dense monotypic stands outcompeting indigenous mangroves. The mangrove forests of the Niger Delta has been severely deforested due to several factors ranging from use of wood for fuel to smoke fish, construction; deforestation due to making access ways for oil and gas exploration, infrastructure for oilfields, dredging, vegetation clearance, fishing as well as oil spills.



Photo credit: Wikimedia Commons (User: Sengkang) [[link](#)]

The competitive nypa replaces indigenous *Rhizophora* and *Raphia* palm. The nypa palm can grow as tall as 10mtrs, unlike other palms it lacks an upright stem, and instead it has thick, prostrate, rhizomatous stems that branch dichotomously underground. Monotypic stands are produced due to new plants growing out vegetatively from each branch. The absence of leaf litter and stilt roots, result in reduced estuarine habitat and has had impacts on fisheries- including reduced catches.

Reference:

Global Invasive Species Database (2011) *Nypa fruticans* Wurmb.



[Click here to view archives of previous weeks' species](#)