

BROMELIAD SOCIETY OF SAN FRANCISCO



February 2006

NEWSLETTER

Our next meeting will be held on **Thursday, January 19, 2006** at 7:30 PM
Recreation Room, San Francisco County Fair Building, 9th Avenue at Lincoln Way, Golden Gate Park,
San Francisco

February Program

Iguaçu Falls and its Bromeliads

Situated on the border between Brazil and Argentina, the Iguaçu Falls lie 19 km upriver from the confluence of the Rio Iguaçu and the Rio Alta Parana. Here are 275 falls plunging over a precipice of more than a mile and a half, with an average drop of 300 feet to the river below. There are 400 species of birds including five members of the toucan family and over 100 species of butterflies and even bromeliads.

These falls are 60 feet higher than Niagara and about one and a half times as wide. Eleanor Roosevelt is said to have exclaimed on first seeing these falls: "Poor Niagara! This makes Niagara look like a kitchen faucet."

Peter Wan will provide a slide show of a trip that he and some of our society members made to the Argentina side in 2004.

February Refreshments

Casper Curto and **Daryl Ducharme** signed up for refreshments this month.



One of the many magnificent views of the Falls. Come to the meeting to see many more spectacular scenes.

January Meeting

Last month's meeting was devoted to Winter blooming plants. It was grand show-and-tell meeting and our members produced lots of beautiful plants that were in bloom in January. Many of these grow outdoors year round which is a plus for those of us who do not have a greenhouse or have no room in the greenhouse. I will not remember all of the plants that were represented, but there were *Aechmea recurvata* v. *benrathii*, *Tillandsia imperialis*, a *Quesnelia*, a small *Aechmea* clump, and many more. You members came through with lots of plants for the meeting.

The Unruly Pitcairnia

This article by Chet Blackburn, is taken from the June 1996 *The Bromeliad News*, newsletter of the Sacramento Bromeliad Society.

Every family has a horse thief somewhere in its past. In fact, for many families horse thieves make up one or more branches of the family tree. In my family, they probably make up the whole damned canopy, but the point is that no family is without the occasional outsider who refuses to conform to traditions held by the rest of its members – an outlaw who refuses to behave like every other member of the family.

And so it is with bromeliads. The recalcitrant member of this otherwise stable family is the genus *Pitcairnia*. *Pitcairnia*, and its unruly brother genus *Pepinia*, do not always follow the rules that “everyone knows” apply to bromeliads. This in spite of the fact that *Pitcairnia* is one of the first bromeliad genera to evolve. Let's cite some examples:

1. Maple trees are deciduous, grapevines are deciduous, tulips are deciduous, but “everyone knows” bromeliads are not deciduous. Someone needs to explain that to the small group of *Pitcairnia*s which annually shed their leaves to get through the dry season.
2. “Everyone knows” that a bromeliad leaf consists of a blade and a sheath. No one looks at a bromeliad expecting to see a leaf with a petiole. Yet some of the *Pitcairnia*s can't even get this simple morphological adaptation right.
3. The family Bromeliaceae is restricted to the western hemisphere. Every member of the family but one species is found here. Care to guess which genus includes the solitary outcast?
4. “Everyone knows” that one of the main characteristics for sorting out the three subfamilies of Bromeliaceae is the presence or absence of spines on the foliage. The subfamilies Bromelioideae and Pitcairnioideae have them; Tillandsioideae does not. Leave it to *Pitcairnia* to disrupt this comfortable scheme by some of its members having both types of leaves – spiny and spineless – on the same plant. Some even have spines at the bases of the leaf but none along the blades.
5. “Everyone knows” that bromeliads do not like to be over watered or grow in soggy soil. Yet there are *Pitcairnia*s growing in the wild in what can only be described as sopping wet conditions.
6. Bromeliads, like orchids, are the subjects of rampant if not random hybridizing. Hybridizers can't seem to pass a pair of blooming bromeliads without wondering what the offspring between them would look like. For example, there are only about 40 species of *Cryptanthus*, but there are close to a thousand hybrids and cultivars listed – the differences between some of them so small that “subtle” would even be too strong a word to use in describing them.

There are less than 100 *Neoregelia* species described, but there are 100 pages of hybrids and cultivars (about 21 plants per page) listed in Don Beadle's Preliminary Listing of All Known Cultivar and Grex Names for Bromeliaceae.

Therefore, you would expect a huge genus like *Pitcairnia*, second only to *Tillandsia* in the number of species in the bromeliad family, to have been hybridized and cultivated to high heaven, wouldn't you? Beadle lists eleven hybrids and no cultivars.

7. Another compulsion of hybridizers is the creation of bigenerics. There are a lot of horticultural Frankenstein's in our hobby who are bent on creating new life forms. *Navia* is the genus closest to *Pitcairnia*, hence it is the most likely candidate for bigeneric dallying,

but have you ever heard of an X Navcainria? If even hybridizers ignore a genus, you know it must be a disreputable one.

8. That bromeliad growers will collect almost anything is apparent by the fact that some of those bigenerics remain in collections. Why in the world would anyone want to grow an X Neomea 'Nebula', for example? Still, as indiscriminate as we bromeliad collectors are, do you know of anyone who has as many as six of the 320 or so species of Pitcairnia?



This is *Pitcairnia heterophylla*, one of the sticky and deciduous bromeliads. Photo is by Derek Butcher and is courtesy of the Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies.

Not only are the Pitcairnia and Pepinias a primitive bunch, but as shown above, they are also an unruly one. For sake of simplicity, in this discussion no distinction is made between the Pitcairnia and Pepinia genera. They both were formerly included as subgenera of Pitcairnia, but recently Pepinia has been elevated to the status of genus.

However, I might add that in his introduction to The Alphabetical List of Bromeliad Binomials, Harry Luther remarks, "Nomenclatural problems continue to plague the resurrected genus Pepinia. A number of taxa that appear to belong in Pepinia have never formally transferred from Pitcairnia."

Why doesn't that surprise me?

Caffeine Kills - Slugs

This article from the Pacific Business News is taken from the July 2002 newsletter of the Bromeliad Society of Hawaii.

A Big Island study finds that caffeine can be an effective pesticide. The United States Pacific Basin Agriculture Research Center in Hilo reports in this week's edition of the journal Nature that even small quantities of caffeine seem to kill snails, slugs and similar slimy species without environmental ill effects.

To humans, caffeine is a pick-me-up. To mollusks it is a neurotoxin. "We found that large slugs placed on loose soil and sprayed with a one or two percent solution of caffeine responded with uncoordinated writhing; the only survivors were the few that were able to burrow into the soil soon after treatment," said the Center's Richard Hollingsworth. Hollingsworth said his team was actually testing the effects of caffeine solutions on other pests when they made the snail and slug discovery. He also said there were palms and orchids nearby and their leaves were damaged.

Do You Grow *Billbergia* Muriel Waterman?

This article by Bea Hanson from Auckland, New Zealand, is taken from the June 1996 The Bromeliad News, newsletter of the Sacramento Bromeliad Society.

I am sure there are many bromeliad fanciers who grow *Billbergia* Muriel Waterman as it is one of the loveliest there are. Many of us admire the plant, but I wonder how many know it was named after a bromeliad grower in New Zealand?

I came into contact with Muriel Waterman through an advertisement she placed in one of our newspapers. She asked if anyone interest in cacti and succulents would like to contact her. As I had just developed a burning enthusiasm for these plants I at once sent off a letter. Back came a reply inviting me to visit her and telling me she had no telephone as she couldn't bear the things. In those days it was a major task to get to her place. I had to take one bus, then change into another to reach her district. After getting off the bus there was then a walk of about ten minutes.

The house was old, the garden crammed with beautiful plants, and Muriel Waterman a

charming lady. She had a great sense of humor and a beautiful smile and one felt as if they had known her for years. I saw both cacti and succulents that I had only seen pictured in books. I asked her if she sold any and she said she did. She showed me where they were and said all were priced and that she hated taking money from friends so I was to total them up and leave the money on the shelf.

Our association continued and not long after the bromeliad bug struck. Soon the garden was more bromeliads than cacti and succulents. I saw my first *Ochagavia lirdleyana* [there is no *Ochagavia* species with this name – Ed.] in flower, my first *Bromelia balansae* and was enchanted with the brilliant red of the heart when it was about to flower. All sorts of wonderful bromeliads were being imported by Muriel Waterman now and it was a great thrill to visit her and see her latest additions.

She had many failures and many successes but she loved to try the plants in different places outside. Her glasshouse housed the better plants and it was indeed a thrill to go and browse in it. As well as working with the plants she looked after a large number of bantams and these little golden and brown pets were a minor trouble as they tended to do some damage from time to time.

With the same enthusiasm as she grew and added more plants to her collection she worked to get members for The Bromeliad Society. She was extremely successful and gathered in quite a number. One day I saw my first *Aechmea Foster's Favorite* and immediately wanted one. She said she couldn't let me have it as it was only for the members but if I joined I would be able to have one. I told her it was sheer blackmail, but she won. As her collection grew she was able to send out price lists to the members and I offered to type them for her. By the name of each plant she put a short description such as "beautiful," "this is just wonderful," etc. Even in the price lists her enthusiasm overflowed. When going anywhere by bus she always took a bromeliad Journal and sat with it open at a picture and if anyone mentioned it she was able to tell them all about bromeliads.

She hated having to go and buy new clothes and always said she was much happier in a store that sold tools. In the winter her favorite dress was an old quilted dressing gown which she said was the warmest thing you could wear! The first time I saw her in it I thought she had been ill and asked her what had been the matter.

It was a great pity she was such a shy person as when our society was formed it would have been wonderful to have her give us a talk and pass on some of her great knowledge. She was happy only when she was talking to two or three people – no more. Her greatest joy was to get a card from Customs to say there was a parcel of plants waiting for her. She would rush over on the next bus and to quote: "Bring them home clasped lovingly to my bosom." Then would come a letter telling me all about the new bromeliads – such excitement.



Billbergia Muriel Waterman photo is from Bird Rock Tropicals and courtesy of the Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies..

It was a sad day when we heard she was ill. She died shortly after from a stroke. She was greatly missed by her many friends, both here and overseas. Most of us had Muriel Waterman stories and many are the times we have exchanged them. A lovely lady.

She was born in the United States but spent most of her life here. Her books were all sold and those who bought them were ever reminded of her by the remarks she had left in the margins – always in green ink. There would be a plant underlined and in the margin remarks such as: “I must have this,” “this died,” “got this in the last parcel,” etc. So typical of her great enthusiasm which bubbled always.

There are many more happy thoughts about her, but I hope that these few will make your Billbergia just a little more interesting.

Upcoming Meetings and Activities

Bruce McCoy has been busy lining up a wonderful set of speakers for this year’s monthly meetings. Here is what he has scheduled so far.

March 16th: Dennis Heckart will be returning for a visit from his home on the Big Island to present a show entitled, what else, "Bromeliads in Hawaii." Welcome back Dennis!

April 20th: Jeffrey Kent of Kent's Bromeliad Nursery will dazzle us with a show on Ecuador and provide a plant table from his nursery.

June 6 through June 11: Bromeliads on the Border, 17th World Bromeliad Conference in San Diego.

June 15: Guillermo Rivera from Cordoba, Argentina will provide a show on the bromeliads of Argentina.

June 17 and 18: Our annual plant sale at the San Francisco County Fair Building.

Sunday, July 23rd: A tour of some members' gardens and collections in San Francisco.

August 17th: Betty Patterson of Dallas and avid Ecuador trekker.

September 21st: Bruce Holst of Marie Selby Gardens and former BSI Journal co-editor on the Tapuis of Venezuela. The Lost World!!

December 21st: Holiday Potluck

Upcoming Fund Raisers

Our president has assembled a list of the fund raisers that we will be having this year.

Berkeley Botanic Garden Spring Sale: (table with society info, 4/28 7:30pm and 4/29 10-2)

Strybing Botanic Garden Spring Sale:(table with society info and donated sale plants, 5/5 5-8pm and 5/6 10-2)

Purchase Sale Plants for June sale (St Vincent de Paul plants, Tillandsia International, etc. label and prep for sale)

June Sale with Succulent and Cactus Society: (society info and sale plants, donated and re-sale) June 16 (setup), sale on June 17 and 18

Garden Days at Strybing: (table with info and donated sale plants, unknown date)

Oct sale with SF Orchid Society: (purchase plants for resale)

Welcome, New Members

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BROMELIAD SOCIETY OF SAN FRANCISCO (BSSF)

The BSSF is a non-profit educational organization promoting the study and cultivation of bromeliads. The BSSF meets monthly on the 3rd Thursday at 7:30 PM in the Recreation room of the San Francisco County Fair Building, 9th Avenue at Lincoln Way, Golden Gate Park, San Francisco. Meetings feature educational lectures and displays of plants. Go to the affiliate section of the BSI webpage for information about our meetings.

The BSSF publishes a monthly newsletter that comes with the membership. Annual dues are single (\$15), dual (\$20). To join the BSSF, mail your name(s), address, telephone number, e-mail address, and check made payable to the BSSF to:

Harold Charns, BSSF Treasurer, 255 States Street, San Francisco, CA 94114-1405.

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BROMELIAD SOCIETY INTERNATIONAL

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BROMELIAD SOCIETY
OF
SAN FRANCISCO

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Dues for our society are now payable!
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