

BROMELIAD SOCIETY OF SAN FRANCISCO



August 2006

NEWSLETTER

Our next meeting will be held on **Thursday, August 17, 2006** at 7:30 PM
Recreation Room, San Francisco County Fair Building, 9th Avenue at Lincoln Way, Golden Gate Park,
San Francisco

August Program

The Aechmea Genus

This month we are fortunate to have **Elizabeth Patterson** from Dallas, Texas. Betty is an expert on bromeliads and she has traveled to study the bromeliads of Ecuador every year since 1985. When she isn't collecting in Ecuador, she is playing the string bass for the Dallas Symphony Orchestra.

Betty's first visit to our society was in 1999 when she showed us many flowering puyas in Ecuador. Her presentation this time is on the Aechmea genus. For those of you who have been collecting bromeliads for a while you will know of John Anderson from Corpus Christi, Texas whose specialty was the Aechmeas – he owned almost all of the known species. Although John has passed away, Betty has assembled a set of slides from his personal collection that she will share with us.

Betty also will be providing us with a plant table of unusual bromeliads.

August Refreshments

Carl Carter and **Roger Lane** signed up for refreshments this month.



Betty Patterson, taken at WBC 1998. Photo is courtesy of **Marilyn Moyer**.

July Meeting

We had our annual visit to member gardens – this year in San Francisco. Next month's newsletter will contain a report on our visit to some wonderful gardens. Thanks to all of you who made this hot Sunday such a success.

Welcome New Members

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Strybing Arboretum Garden Days

Dan Arcos, Dennis Westler and I had a table with a pineapple, show plants, sale plants, BSSF newsletters, BSSF post cards, bromeliad picture books and our new society banner. It was sunny and relatively warm in the enclosed rock garden outside the library and the public was out enjoying it. Our gardening public is ever more familiar with bromeliads, and came with culture questions and a few dollars to expand their collections. We sold about two dozen Pamela Leaver plants, mostly Neos. for \$2-\$4. Also, we sold eight or ten remainder plants from Tropiflora for \$6-\$10. Strybing is always glad to see us (they tell me we're their favorite) and thanked us all for our support. And for me it's always a great time visiting with the membership in a casual setting. (My sunburn should be healed by our next meeting).

Warm Regards,
Carl

The Inflorescence

Periodically, I include articles with some technical terms. This article by Jay Thurrott was originally printed in the July 2005 newsletter of the Florida East Coast Bromeliad Society and is taken from the August 2006 newsletter of the Bromeliad Society of South Florida.

As a general rule, a bromeliad's inflorescence rises from the center of the rosette of leaves that make up the plant. The group of "embryonic" cells in the center of the cups is referred to as the Meristem. This Meristem tissue is the source of new leaves as the bromeliad grows but becomes altered in some way when the plant reaches maturity and produces an inflorescence instead of leaves. This is the reason often offered for why most bromeliads only bloom once in their lives. Once the inflorescence is produced, there is no longer Meristem tissue to form new leaves and the plant slowly dies.

A bromeliad inflorescence may take a number of different forms. The form alone may be distinctive enough to aid in identification of the plant. This can be **erect** (upright), **pendant** (dangling), **semi pendant** (leaning), or even **reflexed** (pendant and then recurving back toward the upright). A **simple** inflorescence would be a single, unbranched stalk, like *Tillandsia bartramii*. *T. utriculata* is an example of a **compound** inflorescence – one that branches. A **digitate** inflorescence is one where the attached structures arise from one point and fan outward like fingers. If the inflorescence has closely attached structures on either side of the stalk, we may say that the inflorescence is **pinnate** – resembling a feather. This type of bloom is often seen in members of the *Vriesea* genus.

Splendor in the Grass at Botanical Garden

This article by Elizabeth Fernandez is taken from the 22 July 2006 San Francisco Chronicle.

Over three decades it grew from a mere speck into a spiky green colossus, a rare and magnificent creature far from its ancestral home. Six feet in height, it resembled, says one of its caretakers, “an exotic clump of grass on steroids.”

Then, about six months ago, on a timetable that only it understood, the creature began to change – its middle started to thicken, the creature seemed to be ... gestating.

The gardener who spotted it thought the growth was abnormal; he worried that the plant was sick.

In fact, the Queen of the Andes was about to bloom. And bloom and bloom she did over the next few months, sending up a stalk of fairy-tale proportions, about a dozen feet high. The largest bromeliad species in the world, the creature planted from a seed 33 years ago at the San Francisco Botanical Garden in Golden Gate Park was in the midst of an highly unusual early flowering.

“It is a very rare plant in the wild,” said Tony Morosco, the plant collections manager. “I believe there are only a couple hundred left. And it usually isn’t grown in botanic gardens. This is a very special occasion.”

For the Queen, as befitting royalty, is finicky, requiring very specific growing conditions: high altitude, dry winters, and excellent drainage. Mostly, the species known as *Puya raimondii* grows in the Andes, typically requiring 80 to 150 years to flower there. But in San Francisco, the Queen took root at the top of a slope in the succulent gardens and thrived.



This is a habitat photo of *Puya raimondii* taken by Jamie Bush in Rodales National Park, Peru. Photo is courtesy of the Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies.

“It flowered really young,” Morosco said. “Maybe it was our warm weather.”

In cultivation, there is only one other recorded flowering – 20 years ago at the UC Berkeley Botanical Garden, Morosco said.

The Queen's seeds were given to the San Francisco Botanical Garden by Victor Reiter, a founding member of the California Horticultural Society and a plant collector of some note.

“Victor spent a lifetime generating contacts around the world,” Morosco said. “He shared a lot with us. He came to us with the seeds of *Puya raimondii* and basically said, ‘Here, try this out.’”

Reiter died in 1986, but his son-in-law says he would be tickled. “It’s nice when a plant comes through,” Robert Scudder said.

Still, like most fairy tales, this one has its share of tragedy. About a month ago, the Queen caught a big wind and toppled over.

“That upset us, it was so pretty to look at,” said Don Mahoney, the horticulture manager. “If we had known the wind was coming, we could have tied a rope around it.”

Yet even in her undignified perch on the ground, the Queen has enough stamina to finish her job.

For the flowering of *Puya raimondii* is a one-time phenomenon – the Queen flowers and then she dies. Like mothers everywhere, she gives all for her offspring – every bit of energy is pumped into the next generation of seeds.

Those seeds – thousands of them – will be harvested and shared. And the Queen will live on, vows Mahoney.

“We’ll start again in a greenhouse,” he said. “The first year, they will be as big as a thimble. The next year, maybe 3 inches. And someday, somebody’s grandkids will be able to see the plant bloom, maybe in 35 to 50 years.”

Bromeliads Down Under -World Conference in Cairns - 2008

This article is reprinted from the August 2006 newsletter of the San Diego Bromeliad Society.

The 18th World Bromeliad Conference will be held in Cairns, Australia in June 2008. There’s already a lot of talk among San Diego Bromeliad Society members about getting up a good contingent of attendees.

Joyce Brehm, President of BSI, announced that all BSI members who attended the World Conference in San Diego will get a special rate of \$115 [conference registration – Ed.] if they pay by September 30th of this year. The \$115 is fully refundable through May 1, 2008. A letter with details will go out to all the attendees of the San Diego conference this month.

Registration fees for all others will be the same as for the conference in San Diego. BSI members who pay by June 30, 2007 will pay \$140 (US). Non-members will pay \$170 (US). After that, the rates will go up \$25-\$60 depending on the date. Registration forms and other information will be available soon on the BSI website www.BSI.org.

Puya raimondii

This article by Dr. Martin Cardenas is taken from the April 1988 The Inflorescence, newsletter of the South Bay Bromeliad Associates. If you wish to seek out this plant in habitat, here are some locations to try.

The first naturalist to see *Puya raimondii* Harms was apparently A. D’Orbigny, who saw it between Cochabamba and Santa Cruz, Bolivia in October 1830. In his “Voyage dans l’Amerique Meridionale”, he remarks that he was astonished by a large isolated and roundish plant on a grassy slope where no other trees were seen. When he approached the plant, of course not in flower, he thought it was an Agave.

The name of this giant *Puya* commemorates the well-known Italian scientist Antonio Raimondi, who resided in Peru for many years and made wide botanical explorations there. He discovered

this species in Peru and published it as *Pourretia gigantea* in "El Peru," Volume 1, Page 297, 1874. As the epithet "gigantea" had already been used in *Puya* by Philippi for a Chilean species, the botanist Harms renamed the plant for Raimondi in 1928.

The great German botanist T. Herzog, in 1911, took pictures of about fifty *P. raimondii* in full flower on the Andean slopes near Araca, Dept. of La Paz, Bolivia. Probably no other scientist has ever seen such a magnificent sight.

In September 1951, I saw *P. raimondii* in flower between Cochabamba and de Huakanqui, at 3400 meters altitude, and showed him a *P. raimondii* in flower. We both took pictures in kodachrome. A picture by Foster was published in the *National Geographic Magazine* in October 1950, and shows a ladder against the *Puya* to let a boy climb to the top and collect the flowers. The other picture in that article was taken by me. Later we saw *P. raimondii* at the granite quarry near Comanche near La Paz at 3800 meters altitude.

In September 1951, I saw *P. raimondii* in flower between Cochabamba and Santa Cruz at a place called Kayarani, which in Quechua, means "place of *Puya*." I had two boys collect nectar from the hundreds of flowers into a jar, and took motion pictures of this plant with a large hummingbird flying around its flowers.

In January 1966, while traveling the same route as D'Orbigny, I saw near Vacas Lakes, hundreds of *P. raimondii*. These were not flowering and looked very much like Agaves, with each plant forming a giant ball of leaves. I took pictures showing this striking ball silhouette. Seeds were taken to send to the University of California Botanical Garden, Berkeley, California. Later this year I plan to visit again the Vacas Lakes, where there are so many hundreds of plants of this rare species in the hope that I will find them in flower. – *University of Cochabamba, Bolivia.*

This article by Bob Reilly from Queensland, Australia is reprinted from the June 2006 *Orlandiana*, newsletter of the Bromeliad Society of Central Florida.

Occasionally, variegated bromeliads (and much more rarely, non-variegated ones) produce a pup without any chlorophyll in its leaves. The leaves of these pups are usually completely white. This is a form of albinism.

Because their leaves lack chlorophyll, and thus cannot produce the sugars or "food" the plant needs, such pups will ultimately die if detached from the mother plant. So, if you wish to enjoy them, leave them attached to the mother plant and they may survive for several years. These pups can be quite attractive.

If you do not wish to keep the albino pup, then remove it as soon as possible as it "drains" the mother plant's resources and reduces the number of pups it will produce.

Some pups have a few leaves which are not entirely white. Depending upon the amount of chlorophyll they have, such pups may be able to be detached and produce a mature plant. However, they will probably need careful attention as they are usually much "weaker" than normal plants. Unfortunately, the extra stress associated with flowering often kills these plants before any worthwhile pups are produced.

Albino Bromeliads

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
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Next month, Bruce Holst will be our speaker!
