

BROMELIAD SOCIETY OF SAN FRANCISCO



November 2005

NEWSLETTER

Our next meeting will be held on **Thursday, November 17, 2005** at 7:30 PM
Recreation Room, San Francisco County Fair Building, 9th Avenue at Lincoln Way, Golden Gate Park,
San Francisco

November Program

Tropiflora and More

This month, **Thomas Vincze** will provide a slide show on his visit to Florida bromeliad nurseries. The show will predominately cover plants at Tropiflora, but that will be a lot because Tropiflora is probably the largest commercial nursery in the country for bromeliad collectors. Tom is one of our newer members, so let's all come out for a great show.

Carl Carter will provide our plant table this month and I know that he recently placed an order to a Florida nursery, so you will be able to get some new plant material.

November Refreshments

Bruce McCoy has signed up for refreshments this month. Can someone help Bruce with refreshments?



Here is *Aechmea recurvata* var. *recurvata*. Photo is courtesy of Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies.

October Meeting

Last month **Roger Lane** provided a slide show of unusual bromeliad genera. The criteria for selecting these genera were plants that are not available commercially, plants that are plain and of little interest to the hobbyist, plants that are difficult to grow outside of their native environment, and plants that are too large to devote to a hobbyist's collection. Roger wrongly assumed that our members do not grow Pitcairnia/Pepinia and was surprised to see that about 5 of our members do grow them. All the other genera he picked were indeed unusual and had not been seen by any of our members.

Ben Franklin Celebration

Ben Franklin

February 10, 1928 – October 21, 2005

Our long time club member and friend Ben Franklin passed away on Friday, October 21, 2005. For many years, Ben belonged to the Northern California Cactus and Succulent Society, and then 20 years ago, he became a founding member and supporter of the San Francisco Succulent and Cactus Society. He was a board member and advisor for many years.

Ben loved all plants and was an active member of the Bromeliad, Epiphyllum, Orchid, Begonia, Gesneriad, and Geranium societies in San Francisco. Ben had always wanted a celebration of life party and so **on Saturday, November 26 from 11:00 A.M. to 2:00 PM in the Recreation Room, 9th and Lincoln Way, San Francisco. We will have a potluck lunch and celebration for him.** We ask those who knew him and wish to come to please bring a main dish, desert, cold drinks, or wine. Ben loved flowers, so maybe a small bouquet from your garden would be decorative also.

Each club will have their own remembrances of Ben and we will share those thoughts with each other. **Let's have a party for Ben!**

For further information contact Kaye Rosso at (925) 376-6903 or Gary Ware at mensaje@jps.net

Aechmea recurvata

This article by Herb Plever is taken from the May 1999 Bromeliana, newsletter of the New York Bromeliad Society. Many of us grow the many varieties and cultivars of this species. It is an easy plant to grow, can be grown outdoors, and it has an attractive flower spike.

Indoor growers who have sunny south, west, or south-east windows will do well to grow *Aechmea recurvata*. It is small enough to fit on the window sill and it is a very tough plant, able to take the drier conditions of your house or apartment. It can grow in a 4½ inch pot and produce a colorful, long-lasting inflorescence.

Dr. Lyman Smith, in his 1979 Monograph on the sub-family *Bromelioideae*, placed *Aechmea recurvata* in Subgenus *Ortgiesia*, where it is distinguished by having a scape wholly covered by the leaf sheaths, flower bracts usually serrulate (but not so with var. *benrathii*), sepals 9-15 mm long without a terminal mucro (sharp tip) and leaf blades triangular and uniformly narrowing from base to apex. The plant flowers about 7-8 inches high and its leaves are about 6 inches long. The broad sheaths form an ellipsoid pseudo bulb and are densely lepidote (covered with white scales). The leaf blades are lepidote below and green and nearly glabrous (without scales) on their top sides. The floral bracts are red and longer than the sepals and the flowers are erect and sessile (without stems). The petals are over 1 inch long, rose-pink, purple, or purple-black.

Dr. Smith provided a key to the three recognized varieties as follows:

1. Inflorescence almost completely exerted above the leaf sheaths; floral bracts serrate.....var. *recurvata*
1. Inflorescence almost wholly included by the leaf sheaths.
 - 2a. Leaves and bracts strongly serrate.....var. *ortgiesii*
 - 2b. Leaves and bracts entire (spineless) or nearly so.....var. *benrathii*

So it **should** be easy to distinguish the varieties. If most of the inflorescence rises above the leaf sheaths and its floral bracts have spine it is var. *recurvata*. If most of the inflorescence does not rise above the leaf sheaths and if its leaves and the floral bracts have spines, it is var. *ortgiesii*. If

the spike is mostly included and the leaves and floral bracts are without spines or nearly so it is var. *benrathii*. Right? No, it is not so easy because these plants are so variable and your plant may fit conflicting key descriptions. Dr. Lyman Smith says *A. recurvata*'s leaves are "very variable from sun to shade" and that the leaf blades are "abruptly spreading or recurving from the junction with the sheaths". If the conformation of the plant depends on cultural conditions, it is understandable that there are problems distinguishing var. *ortgiesii* from var. *recurvata*.

One of the problems is that we are measuring the height of the inflorescence against the top of the leaf **sheaths**, but the leaves may be stiff and spreading or they may recurve downward. In the latter case the recurving takes place where the leaf blades join the sheaths so that in fact the top of the sheaths are the top of the plant. In a plant with stiff leaves in a spreading rosette, it is almost useless to measure the inflorescence height against the sheaths.

The plant in the photo wrongly labeled var. *ortgiesii* on the cover of the May-June 1965 issue of the Bromeliad Society Bulletin has a visible scape and the spike exceeds the tops of the leaves. In the photo wrongly labeled var. *benrathii* found in Victoria Padilla's "Bromeliads" (p. 64) (also reprinted on p. 136 of the Nov-Dec. 1970 Bromeliad Society Bulletin) the clearly serrulate plant has a visible scape and the inflorescence rises above the tops of the leaf blades. Both of these are likely var. *recurvata*. In Bob Wilson's "Bromeliads in Cultivation" (p. 44), a top view of the plant is shown so it is hard to assess the height of the inflorescence, but the top leaf blades are recurved and at least part of the inflorescence appears to be below the sheaths. The same top view of var. *ortgiesii* is seen in Charles Wiley's photo from the Sep-Oct 1966 BSI Bulletin (p. 120), which I will discuss later in this article.

I have never seen a specimen of var. *ortgiesii* nor any photo of that plant with its inflorescence **fully** included below the sheaths as depicted in a drawing of var. *ortgiesii* in the Sept/Oct 1998 issue of the "Bromeliad Gazette", published by the Bromeliad Society of South Australia. This shows a fully included inflorescence, but I don't

know if it was copied from a live plant or is an artistic rendering of the herbarium type specimen – or is an idealization of the botanical description. That publication is edited by Derek Butcher, so credence must be placed on its authenticity. Uncle Derek is a pesky taxonomic detective who pays careful attention to the smallest details. Still, it would be nice to be able to see a live var. *ortgiesii* with a wholly or even mostly included inflorescence.

It would make life easier for growers and amateur noodlers in taxonomy (and I would be a happy splitter) if *A. recurvata* var. *recurvata* were to be restricted to the habit of the plant shown in the Monograph drawing shown on page 1, with at least the upper leaf blades being recurved and pendant. This would be consonant with the species name, *recurvata*. Then var. *ortgiesii* could aptly apply to the type with stiff, spreading leaves. Alternatively, I would be a happy lumpner if var. *ortgiesii* could be merged with var. *recurvata*. These considerations will have to await a major revision of the key to the genus *Aechmea*, which I have no doubt will occur in the next few years.

Var. *recurvata* is found growing mostly epiphytically from near sea level to altitudes of 2,000 feet in full or partial sun in southern Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, and northeastern Argentina. Elton Leme, in his "Bromeliads in the Brazilian Wilderness", describes var. *variegata* as a "small species with coriaceous (leathery) leaves...perfectly adapted to the xeric (dry) environment of the sandy coastal plains where it lives as an invader" (in transition from vegetative and grassland areas). No doubt those plants growing in the latter environments are larger plants with spreading leaves and the xeric species are smaller, more compact with more serrulate pendant blades (see Wiley below).

In many clones of var. *recurvata* the floral bracts, center leaves and even the entire plant will turn bright red upon flowering. It had been thought that this was only true for var. *recurvata* and var. *benrathii*, but not for var. *ortgiesii*. But it appears that not only leaf color, but size, conformation and inflorescence height (characters which define the varieties) are related to cultural conditions. This is well described by the experiments of the

late Charles Wiley, reported in his fine article entitled “Bromeliads on the Rocks” in the Bromeliad Society Bulletin issue of Sept-Oct. 1966. He grew var. *ortgiesii* both in the ground and in holes he drilled in porous tuffa rock and after two years he found pronounced differences: “In the ground the plants grew nicely to about 14 inches. In the spring the spike extended above the top of the plant about two or three inches, a nice red. On the rock the plant grew nicely but was more compact and only about 7 or 8 inches high. It came into spike two months before the one in the ground. The inflorescence extended well out of the leaves but no further. The entire plant turned a beautiful blazing red.” (This description by a great scientific grower and observer is the reason I placed a question mark in the above caption. The key definition doesn’t work very well.) [Photo of plant and caption with question mark is not included here. – Ed.]

Var. *ortgiesii* is reported to grow epiphytically and sometimes as a terrestrial in Brazil at altitudes of from near sea level to 6,000 feet. I am sure that those growing near sea level and partially shaded are larger and more spreading than those growing in full sun at high altitudes.

Var. *benrathii* grows saxicolous on rocks at low altitudes in Brazil’s Santa Catarina province. The center leaves (and sometimes the entire plant) in var. *benrathii* turn red at flowering.

The variability of the species extends to some lovely cultivars. There is a red-leaved form of var. *recurvata* with dark purple flowers as pictured below. The leaves are red even before flowering. There is also a pretty variegated form called ‘Aztec’ [also called ‘Aztec Gold’ – Ed.] which is shown at the bottom of this page. Ed Hummel developed a plant he called ‘Cardinalis’, but it is a cultivar of var. *recurvata* and is not a recognized variety. It has a very large spike with raspberry red bracts all of which extend above the leaves. Hummel also developed a lovely small cultivar called ‘Sueños’ which we grew for many years and which is still available in nurseries. A third Hummel cultivar is ‘Red Dragon’ with soft leaves and coral-red primary bracts which likely was a cross of *A. recurvata* with another (unknown) species, available in nurseries.



Aechmea recurvata var. *benrathii* photo is courtesy of Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies



Aechmea recurvata var. *ortgiesii* photo by Orlando Graeff

Aechmea recurvata var. *ortgiesii* photo is courtesy of Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies

The Old, the New and the Odd!

This article by Larry Giroux is taken from the July 1995 CALOOSAHATCHEE MERISTEM, newsletter of the Caloosahatchee Bromeliad Society.

Most of us have or are familiar with *Aechmea recurvata*. This species is a dark green mid-sized bromeliad which has an attractive bloom and

pups readily. At the San Diego World Bromeliad Conference and Show, Maura Williams won with a new cultivar *Aechmea recurvata* Aztec Gold.

In the March-April 1995 issue of the Journal of the Bromeliad Society, John Catlan recalls how he put principles of horticulture to work for him to produce the parent of this award winning bromeliad. He defined three lessons he discovered from observation. John applied his “lessons” to an *Aechmea recurvata* which was discovered with a yellow stripe on one of its leaves. The following reviews his achievement at producing *Aechmea* Aztec Gold.

“Lesson 1. If a plant falls over and a pup forms, nine times out of ten the pup will start on the top side of the plant.”

Noting that pups developed most often on the upper side of the parent when a plant has been left on its side for any length of time, John laid the *Aechmea* on its side with the yellow striped leaf in the upper position.

“Lesson 2. If you liquid feed a plant, by foliar feed it on one side you increase your chances of getting a pup from that side.”

John realized that pups develop roots furthest from the parent and pups also develop on the mother farthest from the grandmother. This suggested that feeding through the leaves on just one side might encourage development of pups on that side preferentially.

Lesson 3. If the plant is denied light on one side, it will throw pups on the side facing the light source.”

His last lesson was learned when he had placed several plants under a bench; the pups developed on the side which received direct natural light rather than the side exposed to the north.

Applying his “lessons” he was able to produce an all yellow pup and as we know from prior experiences these pups are not able to live off the parent. Luck was on John’s side. As this yellow pup grew it developed a solid green strip which intensified and supported the growth of the plant. During the following three years 10 pups developed from the first pup and all developed true to color.

We owe individuals like John Catlan a great deal of credit for their foresight and perseverance. We benefit through their efforts with an almost endless supply of new and exciting bromeliads which we can enjoy into the future.



Aechmea 'Aztec Gold'

Aechmea Aztec Gold photo is courtesy of Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies.

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

The Journal is published bimonthly at Orlando, Florida by the Bromeliad Society International. Subscription price (in U.S. \$) is included in the 12-month membership dues: single (\$28.), dual (2 members at one address receiving one Journal -\$30). Address all membership and subscription correspondence to: Membership Secretary, John Atlee, 1608 Cardenas Drive NE, Albuquerque, NM 87110-6628

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