

# BROMELIAD SOCIETY OF SAN FRANCISCO

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April 2008

## NEWSLETTER

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Our next meeting will be held on **Thursday, April 17, 2008** at 7:30 PM  
Recreation Room, San Francisco County Fair Building, 9th Avenue at Lincoln Way, Golden Gate Park,  
San Francisco

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### April Program

#### "La Gran Sabana"

We are privileged this month to have **Francisco Oliva-Esteve** visit us from Caracas, Venezuela. He was born in Barcelona, Spain in 1932, studied Architecture at M.I.T; did Post-Graduate studies in City Planning at Yale; and studied Landscape Architecture at the Rhode Island School of Design.

He has lived most of his long career in Caracas, Venezuela where he worked as an Architect and Landscape Architect, designing and developing numerous public works. He has been able to combine his architectural knowledge with that of botany and he has published five books on bromeliads. We have one of his books in our library. **It is possible that he will have some of his books for sale at our meeting.**

He will be showing us a DVD on La Gran Sabana (English: The Great Savannah) which is one of the major natural attractions in Venezuela and is located in the south of Bolivar State on the Venezuelan-Brazilian border, approximately 1,400 km from Caracas. The area has a tropical humid climate with an average temperature of 28 °C, but at night it can go down to 13 °C. The Gran Sabana lies on a plateau with a mean altitude of 1,000 meters above sea level and is dotted with huge table-top mountains called Tapuis, which rise dramatically from the

surrounding plains. Mount Roraima is the tallest of the Tapuis at 2,810 meters above sea level. It also marks the triple border point for Venezuela, Brazil and Guyana.

### April Refreshments

**Bruce McCoy** and **Brian Ransom** will provide our refreshments this month.



This is a recent photo of our speaker taken by **Peter Wan** on his recent trip with **Bruce McCoy** to Venezuela.

## March Meeting

Last month **Wes Schilling** showed us slides from a recent trip he made to Hawaii where he spent some time visiting Ron Parkhurst and his nursery. Wes supplemented his show with a few of the plants he has gotten from Ron – mostly *Vriesea* hybrids that have been hybridized by David Shigii. Our membership provided a spectacular show-and-tell table, as always. Thanks for bringing in your plants to share with the members.

## Ant Gardens of the Amazon

This article is extracted from the January 2007 *Orlandiana*, newsletter of the Bromeliad Society of Central Florida. It was originally printed in Volume 30, Number 3 of *Bromeliaceae*, Journal of the Bromeliad Society of Queensland, Australia.

Ants have been known to colonize odd areas. They are capable of building unusual and large structures as protection against the elements and predators, so it comes as no surprise that they would have devised a way of avoiding the flood waters of the Amazon. Food is always plentiful around riverbanks, a convenient area for them to build their nests, but as the Amazon waters can rise dramatically in the wet season, their nests would be flooded.

To safeguard against this disaster, the ants settle on trees, close to the riverbanks, just above the obvious floodwater marks. They carry earth from the soft ground up to the trees to a selected site, mix it with excrement and use it as an adhesive. The adhesive is worked into crevices of the tree bark and seeds of certain bromeliad species are then placed on this bed of adhesive. The fast growing bromeliads and their pups contribute solidity to the structure, which lasts for years.

After the bromeliads flower they produce berries – the berries contain seed and sweet, sticky gel. Birds take most of the berries; however, the ants manage to harvest enough for their needs. The seed is saved and the gel is used for food. Worker ants again bring earth from the ground and the adhesive is made. Some is used to repair and

stabilize the nest, but most of it is placed further up the tree. Seed from the harvest are set on the new site and so their new home extensions have begun. With many thousands of these ants building their nests on nearby trees, early plant collectors have likened the area to a garden.

A phenomenon, which has been repeatedly observed by plant collectors in forests and jungles, is the fact that pseudo-bulbous bromeliads frequently harbor ants in the spaces between the leaves. Some of these ant colonies can become quite ferocious. Plant collectors favor the concept that a relationship exists between the pseudo-bulbous bromeliads and certain ant species. The plant provides shelter for the ants and the ants in turn, fertilize the plant with their nitrogen rich excrement, supply moisture to the plants from respiration, and defend it against enemies.

## Strybing 41<sup>st</sup> Annual Spring Plant Sale

We will be selling bromeliads at the Strybing Arboretum Spring Plant Sale on Friday evening, **May 2<sup>nd</sup>** from 5-8 PM and Saturday, **May 3<sup>rd</sup>** from 10AM-2PM. **If you are able to donate plants (bromeliads for the landscape are always in demand) or work at the sale, please sign up at this month's meeting or notify Marilyn Moyer (phone 650-365-5560 or e-mail [marilynmoyer@comcast.net](mailto:marilynmoyer@comcast.net)).** We will have a signup sheet for volunteers at this month's meeting. This sale exposes others in the plant world to bromeliads and exposes us to other plant families. It should be a fun event for a worthy cause and you can add to your collection at a very reasonable cost. This sale also provides us the opportunity to promote our society, our June sale, and other activities that we have planned.

If you received Strybing's own web notification of this sale, you will see a photo of a bromeliad flower.

## A Historical Note Mulford Foster 1889-1978

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This article by Jose Donayre originally appeared in the November 2006 edition of The Scurf, newsletter of the Bromeliad Society of Broward County, Florida.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> of November, 28 years ago in 1978, an outstanding leader of the bromeliad world passed away after a life dedicated to the exploration of nature. Since early in life he was interested in the fruits of nature. He was barely 14 and he had made his name known as a herpetologist through his knowledge of North American reptiles about which he lectured widely until he was 21 years old. Then he became an expert on trees and their diseases and he quickly decided his place was in Florida. So he moved where he could be surrounded by tropical flora. First, he focused on succulents but soon bromeliads became his overwhelming interest. He set himself up near Orlando naming his property Bromel-La, his own Shangri-La where he lived with his close collaborator, his wife Racine. Admired for his vast knowledge and his vitality he left many friends and associates among which Eloise Beach of Apopka was probably close to being his disciple.

His contribution spans many decades when he became the dominant international figure in all aspects of the bromeliad field. He did not consider himself a grower but was bent on collecting, identifying, and hybridizing them. Shortly after the Bromeliad Society International (BSI) was started, he became the editor of the Journal, a position he held for many years. He kept a large herbarium and painstakingly described the species collected, identified them, and provided them with names. It is said that he identified nearly 300 new plants. Numerous plants have been named after him (*mulfordiis*, *fosterianums*) or after his wife (*racinae*) or his son (Bert).

Many of them had been collected during his many trips, especially those to Brazil. In fact, his first trip to that country, in 1940, was chronicled in his engaging book “Brazil, Orchid of the Tropics” which is out of print but in our library. This volume should have had bromeliads in the title but the publisher prevailed to ensure sales.

In 1977, a year before his death, the Frazels took a trip to visit the Fosters. Describing their visit in our old newsletter “Commentary,” Bill found a 10 acre property on a lake with greenhouses in the rear. Abundant bromeliads were all planted in ground, with no grass and arranged following a natural disposition around trees and shrubs.

Mulford Foster was a jovial fellow, given to humorous stories and jokes – raunchy sometimes but always entertaining. His keen sense of observation and detail took him to drawing and painting – filling his house with examples of his art. A few weeks ago one of his great granddaughters contacted the Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies looking for his paintings as she was interested in taking pictures for a book she was planning. So, if any readers have one in their possession, please contact the Council and be part of the Mulford Foster legacy.



Here is *Aechmea fosteriana*, one of the many bromeliads named in honor of Mulford Foster. Photo is by Dorothy Berg and is courtesy of the Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies.

### **Bromeliads in Topiary**

The following article is reprinted from the May 1998 Caloosahatchee Meristem, newsletter of the Caloosahatchee Bromeliad Society. It originally

appeared in the Smithsonian Magazine of March 1993. There is a member of the Saddleback Bromeliad Society in southern California who is a master of bromeliad topiary.

Topiary is the clipping and pruning of live shrubs or trees into decorative shapes, cubes, circles, and figures such as birds and animals. The word Topiary comes from both the Latin and the Greek for ornamental gardening. Pliny Elder credits this style of gardening to a friend of Emperor Augustus, circa 1 AD. However, it is thought that probably the gardeners of the imperial city of Rome were likely Greek, Syrian, Egyptian or Hebrew slaves who introduced topiary from other lands. It spread throughout France, Italy, England, Germany and even as far off as the gardens of the Chinese Emperors and has thrived to this very day.

Nowadays, the style has changed slightly. It is no longer confined to rigid ground grown plants. Metal form structures are the basis from which modern topiary is created. A frame in the shape of the bird or animal is constructed, threaded with a watering system and stuffed with moisture holding sphagnum moss in which the desired plant growth is placed. There are many strange examples of this garden oddity today; some are in Longwood Gardens; Ladew Topiary gardens near Towson, Maryland; and in Massachusetts, the Green Animals. In California, the San Diego Zoo boasts of herbaceous birds coexisting with real live birds, pretty pink flamingos. In the later, pink Cryptanthus, probably C. It, Ti and Elaine are all used to create the flamingo coloring. One designer has gone so far as to construct a living plant-topiary of a Hummingbird. She is Lois Harrison of Alabama and her bird-life entity is made entirely of bromeliads. Most are colorful tiny tillandsias in bloom with their bright red, white, and blue inflorescences giving the bird's breast the needed iridescent color. The Hummingbird itself is nested in an area of more blooming tillandsias created by crimson-flushed neoregelias. While the size proportion is greatly exaggerated, it has a very realistic appearance.



How would you like a bromeliad topiary dragon in your back yard?

### Quijadas Donate Plants to Our Raffle

Our President, **Carl Carter**, was recently in San Diego and visited Kay and Joe Quijada. They are fantastic plant growers and have a large collection of succulents and bromeliads in their landscape. You can rely on their plants making it to the head table in all of the bromeliad shows. They generously gave Carl some bromeliads that will be available on our plant raffle table this month. Thank you very much **Kay and Joe**.

### Ernie Gladney Passes Away

**Ernie Gladney**, one of our members for many years passed on March 25, 2008, after an 8 month battle with liver cancer, just 13 days short of his 60th birthday. Ernie was a very person but was very supportive of all of our plant activities. **David Feix** will try to bring photos of his memorial service to the next SFBS meeting.



Here is **Ernie Gladney** sitting down looking at some photos that **Peter Wan** took on one of his safaris. **Francine Henderson**, **David Feix**, and **David** are looking on. This was at last year's tour of Peninsula gardens. Photo is courtesy of **Peter Wan**

### Tour of Conservatory of Flowers with Francisco Oliva-Esteve

**Bruce McCoy** has investigated the possibility of doing a tour of the San Francisco Conservatory of Flowers with Francisco Oliva-Esteve on Thursday afternoon. Lupe says she would be delighted to have us tour. **Bruce needs a head count of people from our society who are interested as soon as possible.** Bruce is planning on meeting at the Conservatory at 3 PM to 3:30 PM. If you are interested in joining the group, e-mail ([bruce.mccoy@gmail.com](mailto:bruce.mccoy@gmail.com)) or call Bruce (415-235-2145).

After the tour, we will go to the parking lot behind the Hall of Flowers and then go to the restaurant of Francisco's choice for dinner. If you want to join us for that, please be at the parking lot at 6pm sharp.

### University of California, Berkeley Plant Sale

The annual Spring Berkeley Plant Sale takes place on **Friday, April 25<sup>th</sup> from 5 PM and on Saturday, April 26<sup>th</sup> from 10 AM to 2 PM.** Our club is providing support for this sale and we need volunteers. There will be a signup sheet at the meeting. Hopefully, at this sale we will be able to promote our own June sale to new people in the East Bay.



*Tillandsia seferiana* is one of the types of plants that ants like to use for their home, but this plant is not found along the Amazon (it ranges from Mexico to Honduras). Photo is by Derek Butcher and is courtesy of the Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies.

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## **BROMELIAD SOCIETY OF SAN FRANCISCO (BSSF)**

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The BSSF is a non-profit educational organization promoting the study and cultivation of bromeliads. The BSSF meets monthly on the 3<sup>rd</sup> 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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## **BSSF 2008 OFFICERS & DIRECTORS**

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## **BROMELIAD SOCIETY INTERNATIONAL**

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BROMELIAD SOCIETY  
OF  
SAN FRANCISCO

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<p><b>We have a special speaker this month!</b></p>
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