

BROMELIAD SOCIETY OF SAN FRANCISCO



October 2008

NEWSLETTER

Our next meeting will be held on **Thursday, October 16, 2008** at 7:30 PM
Recreation Room, San Francisco County Fair Building, 9th Avenue at Lincoln Way, Golden Gate Park,
San Francisco

October Program

Tillandsias in the Wild

Last month, **Paul Isley** showed us tillandsias as grown in his nursery and tillandsia hybrids that he has made. We are fortunate to have another visiting speaker this month: **Dennis Cathcart** from the Tropiflora Nursery in Sarasota Florida. As most of you know, Dennis is a world traveler and he has made many trips to tillandsia country – which is quite a few countries. If you grow tillandsias you do not want to miss this meeting. Dennis is a fantastic photographer and you will see photos of tillandsias from places you will never visit in your lifetime.

At this point your editor is not sure whether Dennis is providing the plant table but you can assume he will be bringing plants to sell.

October Refreshments

Dan Arcos and **Jon Dixon** signed up for refreshments this month.



Here is a photo of **Dennis Cathcart** who is our speaker this month. Photo is by Charles Dills.

September Meeting

Last month **Paul Isley** showed us the beauty of some of his favorite tillandsias and tillandsia hybrids he has made. Paul is a superb photographer and he showed these plants at their best. Some of the species are from plants he has collected in habitat over the years.

Paul brought wonderful plants for sale and there was the usual frenzy in purchasing bromeliads that we each had to have. Your editor obtained a *Tillandsia crocata* with orange flowers and a neat hybrid of *T. usneoides* and *T. recurvata*. Paul was very generous and sold the club all the plants he did not sell at a very fair price. These plants will be placed on our plant table over the next few months.

Paul also told us that he is revising his 1987 book *Tillandsia*. so we can look forward to another new bromeliad book in the near future.

September Bromeliad Sale

Our sale in September was a great success. The gross total was almost \$4100. After Harold calculates all expenses and pays each of the vendors we will know how much will go into our treasury. We could not have had this success without the support of our members. You really came through in a big way. We had plenty of workers all weekend! Our display plants were beautiful; customers were even taking photos of our tillandsia display. We had plenty of boxes for the customers. Harold came up with a spiffy computer system for invoicing each transaction. Sales were so good on Saturday that we removed several empty tables before Sunday.

THANKS TO EVERYONE WHO MADE OUR SALE SO SUCCESSFUL!!!!

Spanish Moss

This article is reprinted from the June 1996 The Commentary, newsletter of the Bromeliad Society of Broward County, Inc. (Florida).

This morning when I hung a small orchid seedling on the fence I drew a strand of Spanish moss (*Tillandsia usneoides*) over it to protect it from the springtime sun. As I did so, I noticed several minute lime-yellow colored blossoms, not much bigger than your little finger nail; my Spanish Moss was in bloom. The flowers were like tiny curled back tri-petaled trumpets with a miniscule gold dot in the center. Just hanging on the fence in full sun and getting what water my rain-birds flood the orchids with about two or three times a week seemed to be enough moisture to maintain the moss's growth; it was already getting lots of sun and plenty of air as the breeze cascades between my house and the one next door. It was a most pleasant surprise and I felt very smug having seen these tiny flowers. Few people do, or even take the time to look. They are reported to have an odor or fragrance, but at the time I did not detect any.



Tillandsia usneoides

photo by Ken Marks

A Thirsty Epiphyte

This article is reprinted from the July 1996 The BSGC News, newsletter of the Bromeliad Society of Greater Chicago. It originally appeared in the March/April bulletin from the Bromeliad Society of Victoria, Inc (Australia).

The rootless tendrils of Spanish moss possess special structures that serve to absorb rain. These are tiny winged scale-hairs which cover the slender shoots of this epiphyte. When no moisture is available, the dry air-filled cells behind these scales are shrunken. The surplus rain, however, is caught between the hair of the scales and the cell layer. From here it seeps slowly into the plant stem providing the Spanish moss both with water and a ration of minerals washed from the host plant.



BSGC Editor's Note – I have been growing Spanish moss for at least six years here in our Northern climate. For the last three years I have had the pleasure of its springtime blooms in my plant room during April and, yes, they are **very** fragrant. I've noticed the flowers at night and during the early morning hours. To enter the plant room during these times is a treat for the senses as the entire room is filled with their fragrance. I do not see the flowers when it warms up during the day. Over the years my supply of moss has increased and has been shared several times.

The first year I had it and when the weather was warm enough to put it outside, it was hung in my crab apple tree. Birds about depleted my supply to feather their nests, but some was rescued and hung high against the garage where birds could not fly or reach it from the ground. Now it hangs in my lath house and adds a very tropical look to my collection.

To bromeliad lovers in Northern climates, it is possible to have Spanish moss grow and thrive here. I urge you to try it. It takes a little bit of extra care during the winter months but it is well worth the effort.

San Francisco Editor's Note - Spanish moss is an incredibly popular plant at our sales and at most bromeliad sales in California. George Long, who is a member of the Saddleback Bromeliad Society, grows it in his back yard for their society sales and tells me that they sell about \$400 worth each year.

The Discovery of *Aechmea orlandiana*

This article is reprinted from the November 1995 issue of The Bromeliadvisory, newsletter of the Bromeliad Society of South Florida.

In 1939 Mulford and Racine Foster undertook their first journey to Brazil.

Unlike our contemporary explorers who have the comparative luxury of airplane travel and four-wheel-drives, the Fosters had it pretty rough. They sailed by steamer from New York to Rio de Janeiro and relied on buses and trains for reaching collecting sites. Not much collecting had been done in southeastern Brazil and the Fosters decided to concentrate on the states of Bahia and Espirito Santo.

It was a slow train journey from Rio to their destination in Espirito Santo, the small city of Cachoeiro. From their hotel window they could see a huge granite rock shaped roughly like a finger and called Dedo de Deus (finger of God). They were sure it was within walking distance.

The first day's walking brought them nowhere near the elusive rock and they had to return to the hotel empty handed. On the second day they wisely hired a guide.

The Fosters walked for miles over hot dry ground and finally arrived near the base of the "finger". Up close, the Dedo de Deus was enormous, and the ground at the base was wet and swampy,

causing further difficulties. On the rocks, sometimes growing in full sun, were several bromeliad species. The Fosters collected a huge *Vriesea*, the largest they had ever found, which proved to be a new species, *Vriesea extensa*. [This plant is now in the *Alcantarea* genus – Ed.]



Photo of the *Alcantarea extensa* is by Peter Tristram and is courtesy of the Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies.

They continued on, battling through thick undergrowth. Mulford suddenly gave a shout as he spotted a new plant, an aechmea, growing on an outcrop of rock. It had light green leaves heavily spotted with dark mottling. Racine described it as one of the most spectacular aechmeas ever found, and a month later it bloomed with orange bracts and white flowers. Dr. Lyman Smith later confirmed that it was, indeed, a new species, and they named it *Aechmea orlandiana*, after Orlando, Florida, their adopted city.

Mulford Foster did more to popularize bromeliads for American growers than anyone else,

especially those of us lucky enough to live in Florida. We probably all have some of his plants, hybrids and species in our collections, and *A. orlandiana* is one of the most popular bromeliads for south Florida growers.

Mulford and Racine Foster wrote a wonderful description of their Brazilian trips in the book *Brazil*, published in 1945 by the Jacques Cattell Press, Lancaster, Pennsylvania. The copyright of the book was transferred to the Bromeliad Society, Inc. [now Bromeliad Society International – Ed.] on January 10, 1995, by Racine's sister, Jeanne Sarasy Denny. There is a copy of the book in the members' lending library at Fairchild Tropical Garden. (You must be a member of FTG to check it out).

In her book, *Bromeliads* (Crown Publishers, Inc. New York 1973) Victoria Padilla says this about *Aechmea orlandiana*:

“Epiphytic and terrestrial, growing in shade in forests in Espirito Santo, Brazil. A striking, medium-sized urn-shaped plant with drooping lower leaves, 12 to 18 inches long and 1 ½ inches wide. The pale green leaves, conspicuously marked with zebra like, zigzag bands ranging from maroon to black. In bright light, the ends of the leaves become blotched with maroon. The inflorescence, a compact panicle, is borne on an arching spike. The bracts are salmon scarlet; the flowers pale yellow.”

Aechmea orlandiana does especially well in south Florida when grown on trees in bright light. We have a clump on a small tree that is deciduous in winter. The direct sunlight turns the upper plants a rosy pink while the lower ones retain their contrasting green and brown zigzags. The springtime blooms make a lovely display.



Photo of the *Aechmea orlandiana* is from Bird Rock Tropicals nursery and is courtesy of the Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies.

Tillandsia duratii
(Even the small form can have a big inflorescence)

This article by Herb Plever is reprinted from the October 1997 issue of Bromeliana, newsletter of the New York Bromeliad Society.

Tillandsia duratii (Visiani) (formerly called *T. decomposita*) is one of those weirdly exotic looking plants which is interesting for its shape as well as its stunning fragrant inflorescence. The blades of its one-foot long leaves spirally recurved around tree branches or on whatever else it is growing on. It grows epiphytically in dry woods at altitudes of 1,000 to 3,000 feet in Bolivia, Paraguay, Uruguay and Argentina.

The plant is caulescent with a stout, curved stem which can vary in length from about 6 to 18 inches. The overall appearance is of a gray creature with long tentacles wrapped around its host.

Its height when flowering may vary from about 12 inches to over 3 feet tall. The very tall scape is topped by a most impressive inflorescence which can be from 4 inches to several feet long, with either bipinnate or tripinnate branches or both.

The type *T. duratii* has strict, erect spikes and most inflorescences are bipinnate, but the more commonly grown *var. saxatilis* has spikes that are curved and spreading with a 2-3 pinnate inflorescence. The previously described *var.*

confusa which the monograph had distinguished from *var. saxatilis* by its lepidote flower bracts is now deemed synonymous with *var. saxatilis*.

[My plant is a small form of *T. duratii var. saxatilis*] It was grown epiphytically on cork bark and it reached a height of only one foot before flowering. The scape was about 15 inches tall and the inflorescence had thirteen curved and spreading branches. The main, top branch of the bloom had eight spikes, which were 2 to 4 flowered. The next lower two branches had two 3-flowered spikes while the lower three branches all had three 3-flowered spikes. Thus, this comfortably small plant put up close to 90 flowers.

I believe the size of the inflorescence and the number of spikes and flowers was a direct response to the high dosage of fertilizer the plant absorbed in my bathtub as it soaked for an hour every 12 to 14 days.

The open, purple flowers are extremely fragrant, so that when *T. duratii* is in bloom your room is bathed in perfume for several months. This is definitely a plant you will want to order the next time we send out a plant order list. We will make every effort to find the smaller forms of the plant, because the large types are definitely not convenient to grow in most apartments. We will also try to obtain more mature plants so that you won't have to wait so long before seeing a bloom. You will still need patience, because *T. duratii* is slow-growing.

However, if you use a high strength fertilizer regimen when you soak your plants you won't have to wait too long.

Welcome New Member

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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
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See Tillandsias in habitat this month!
