

BROMELIAD SOCIETY OF SAN FRANCISCO

SEPTEMBER 2016



Meeting Specifics

When: Thursday, September 15

Time: 07:30 PM

Recreation Room

Where: San Francisco County Fair
Building
9th Avenue at Lincoln Way
San Francisco



Billbergias and Bromeliad Hybridizing

This month long time bromeliad grower **Jon Dixon** will be giving a talk on hybridizing bromeliads, particularly billbergias that Jon has had much success with. We have seen them on the Show & Tell table from time to time. Jon is a life long plant enthusiast and has grown bromeliads since the 1970's. His interest range all over the plant kingdom and he has focused on bromeliads over the last 20 years.

Roger Lane signed up for refreshments. Any additional contributions will be appreciated.



August Meeting

Pam Koide Hyatt shared some of her experiences last year in Australia and Singapore

Following a speaking event in Sydney last year, Pam Koide Hyatt visited various bromeliad hybridizers in the Brisbane area and then continued on to Singapore.

In Brisbane, she saw 3 different individuals who concentrated on tillandsia hybridization. Some of their greenhouses were huge but the most interesting fact was that the outside walls

of the greenhouses was where the tillandsias were growing. Pam showed us photos of many of the hybrids, some of which were identical to those that Pam has made herself.

Her visit to Singapore was prompted by some of the young people who are growing bromeliads. They had rented a facility for Pam to provide a talk which turned

into an entire day of several shows. They also took her to the greenhouse spaces they have rented to grow their bromeliads. They are very enthusiastic and good growers. One of the growers took Pam to the residence of a wealthy Singapore man who has used bromeliads to enhance his landscape.

Pam also gave us an update on

Gardens by the Bay includes plants from all over the world such as these huge baobab trees from Madagascar.

Gardens by the Bay starting with a panorama of tulips where many local have their wedding receptions. She showed us many scenes of the plants in the gardens, but her emphasis was on the outdoor mechanical trees that surround the gardens. Her close-up shots showed how

much plant material is growing happily on the trees. She then showed the trees at night with a video of the music playing in conjunction with the lighting. The music varies each evening so it is always entertaining. After having seen 2 separate shows on Gardens by the Bay, your editor wants to visit Singapore!



Collecting in Costa Rica - Vrieseas (Werauhias), Tillandsias and Guzmanias Galore!

The Central Valley of Costa Rica, flanked by ageless active volcanoes and the mountains of a now almost swallowed tectonic plate, is largely cleared and densely settled. Large areas of forest still exist however, in the south along the slopes of the Cordillera de Talamanca. Unlike much of Costa Rica, this mountain range is not of volcanic origin, extending way south into Panama.

One area in which Chester Skotak and I collected was at the northern end of the Talamancas, overlooked to the north by the huge, rounded cone of Volcano Irazu which last erupted in the 1960's, coating the countryside in fertile black ash and spewing lava flows almost to the city of Cartago, blocking the Pan American highway. The area bore few scars of this event, however the huge mound of Irazu and the shattered remains of a never completed cathedral bore testament to the fractured nature of the Earth's crust in that part of the world.

The Rio Grande de Orosi has its source high in the Talamancas and few, if any, roads extend past the hydroelectric stations and the Tapanti National Park at the top end of the valley. Along the lower valley little original vegetation remained and most was on private property. Trees, gardens and hedges full of large *Tillandsia fasciculata*, *T. variabilis*, *T. oerstediana*, *T. utriculata* and smaller *T. bulbosa*, *T. tricolor*, *T. juncea*, *T. leiboldiana* abounded as did *Guzmania lingulata* and *G. monstachia* in various areas.

Not much collecting was attempted until we arrived at the narrow end of the valley where the road traversed the Orosi. In trees along the road a cocktail of tillandsias, *Racinaea*, vrieseas (including Werauhias) and Guzmanias were to be found. A beautiful discolor form of *Tillandsia complanata* were lined up in rows along the sunny side of some branches, while *Racinaea spiculosa* and *R. adpressa* choked others. In a tree fork a clump of boldly striped *Guzmania* was seen, so the old Toyota truck was backed up and a few specimens finally dislodged with the collecting pole. This has since been named *Guzmania skotakii*, a new species. The area was profuse with other *Guzmania* species but most were 'cone-heads' - a typically group of horticultural uninteresting species.

We drove back down the valley a few kilometers to an hydroelectric station access road and started a steep ascent. In the many she-oaks (*Casuaria* species) along property boundaries were more *Tillandsia complanata* as well as red-blotched rosettes of *T. excelsa* of all sizes, large bulbs of *T. butzii*, *T. punctulata*, *T. juncea* and inflated bulbs of the pretty *Vriesea castano-bulbosa* with its leathery, silver-frosted leaves, pink inflorescence and green flowers making a distinctive contrast on the drier side of trees and fence posts. These were the treetop survivors of the rainforest which blanketed this area until fairly recently. The farms were primarily coffee being at 1000-1200 meters altitude, with the dairy cattle a little higher up.

Continuing climbing, the vegetation thickened as the cloudbank approached. It was there at 1500 meters that *Guzmania* and *Vrieseas* (especially *Werauhia*) reached epiphytic dominance. All levels of vegetation were festooned with an enormous variety of *Tillandsioideae*-based species, most of which were not seen at lower altitudes. In this life zone, *Tillandsia excelsa* (large form), *Vriesea castano-bulbosa*, *Racinaea spiculosa* and *adpressa* were still prevalent, but the others had disappeared. It was the domain of the 'Thecophylloid' *Vrieseas*, now lumped into the new genus *Werauhia*, especially in sunny and more exposed sites and the *Guzmanias* dominated the damper and shadier places. *Vriesea leucophylla* with its recurved, dazzling pink spike and maroon cross banded silver-frosted triangular leaves were everywhere in almost every niche, from full sun to total shade, from ground level, by the shiny, yellow and green cross banded rosettes of *V. nephrolepis*, many displaying their typical large, secund polystichous, yellow flowers and hooding maroon primary bracts. (Incidentally, further up these gave way to *V. ourensis* with broader flatter rosettes and bright cross-banding as the UV level increased and a whole new range of predominantly *Vriesea* species -we did not collect there). It was within the protection of the forest that the *Guzmanias*

reached dominance, abounding in all shapes, sizes, and colors. Spectacular red and yellow heads of a large form of *Guzmania blassii* shone in the dim light and luminous, yellow flowered, red hot pokers of a small pin-striped *Guzmania* vaguely similar to *G. nicaraguensis* hung along the undersides of low branches, their bases submerged in moss. Long clumping strands of *G. angustifolia* hung varied stems along the rainforest margin, occasional clumps sporting bright red ‘noses’ as they weaved among the orchids, anthuriums, philodendrons, and epiphytic ferns. The new *G. skotakii* again was found, as was a selection of ‘cone-heads’.

In this area, Chester Skotak assured me that the beautiful *Aechmea veitchii* could be found. He pointed me towards the deepest shade following a precipitous gorge, where few bromeliads, excepting stems of climbing Pitcairnia, could survive. Almost thirty meters down, spectacularly in bloom, the straggly, long-leaved rosettes were eventually seen, sprawling between huge rocks, rhizomes hidden in the decaying vegetation. Finally, a few specimens were obtained; the rest left to propagate.

Back in the sun, the moss along the forest margin contained a profusion of seedlings of many genera, making good grazing for the local cows. Large, broad-leaved, purple-black rosettes of *Vriesea latissima* made a distinctive color contrast in terrestrial areas. The older trees were festooned with epiphytes to the extent that the ground under them was littered with fallen tree-branch gardens in various stages of decay. In these ‘gardens’, species such as *Tillandsia longifolia* and *Racinaea spiculosa* were found as well as tight bulbs of *Vriesea castano-bulbosa*, *Racinaea adpressa*, *Vriesea tonduziana*, and a host of unidentifiable seedlings. One significant find was *Tillandsia cauliflora*, an unusual small tillandsia with bright vermilion, white-dusted tubes and a stunning cylindrical inflorescence. It proved extremely difficult to collect. A giant tree standing around 1 meter high and spreading 2 meters made collecting impossible. Fortunately, the terrestrial moss gardens, occasional seedlings could be found, identifiable by their leaf texture and dark sheaths.

Beside a stand of spectacular, prickly, broadly -lobed tree ferns adjoining nearby Cyprus ‘re-forestation’ area, the unmistakable leaves of *Guzmania plicatifolia* were noticed in the shade, looking all the world like clumps of palm seedlings with their multi-channeled, long thin arching leaves. In the open, atop a large tree stump, a dazzling, zigzag pink spray belonged to the huge *Tillandsia longifolia*, flowering for the first and last time, a natural occurrence unlike the fate of the tree from which it certainly fell.



Vriesea castano-bulbosa



Aechmea veitchii

Everywhere, in every niche, were a myriad of plant species, especially bromeliads, many of which were unknown to me. Most of the plants collected in this area easily survived the rigors of transport and quarantine and are flourishing in my nursery today - many still remaining unidentified.

This article by Peter Tristram is taken from the October 1996 newsletter of the Bromeliad Society of New Orleans. Peter is from Australia and Chester Skotak is known to many of us for his small *Neoregelia* hybrids. Many of the bromeliads in this article are uncommon or not found in cultivation even today (20 years later).

Brom Basics - Plant Names

Recently, a person new to plants admitted that the plant names were confusing them. “Why do we use Latin names?” Like many of us when we first started, plant names were a blur of meaningless words to them.

First of all, why use Latin? In the 17th century, Latin was the language of the intellectuals. It offered a common language that everyone could speak; no matter what was their native language. In addition, it offered the advantage of being a “dead” language; it gave a relatively fixed reference that changed little over time. Thus, the men who built the foundation of modern botany used Latin and this foundation is recognized and used around the world today.

The name contains all the information to identify the plant:

- The first section of the name identifies the genera (*Aechmea*, *Billbergia*, *Tillandsia*, etc.) and is capitalized. Genera names are set by agreement and may refer to a person who found the plant, a place where the plant is found, or some feature of the plant.
- These are followed by species names, which are not capitalized. As our English language is developed from Latin, you can sometimes tell key plant features just from the species name. A list of approved species names is published from time to time.
- Further note that the genus and species name is often correctly printed in italics.

Take the name *Aechmea ampla*. From the name, we can tell that the plant is part of the *Aechmea* genus and it is the species *ampla*. The *Aechmea* genus was so named in 1794 in reference to the lance-like points on the flower bracts. Taking this one step further, the species name *ampla* is Latin for ample or large. Thus, it should be no surprise that *Aechmea ampla* is a big plant.

Let’s try another name - *Billbergia rosea*. We might correctly guess from the name that this member of the *Billbergia* genus is very rosy or red in color. In fact, the body is a deep maroon and the plant features very pink flower bracts.

But you say that you see plants with names that do not appear to be in Latin. How about a plant named *Neoregelia* ‘Pretty Patches’? This name tells us that the plant is a cultivar rather than a species. We can tell this because the name ‘Pretty Patches’ is in quotes, is capitalized, and obviously is not Latin. The name should not be in italics. A cultivar is a cross of different plant species made by man or by nature to form a new plant. Cultivars are identified by these subtle differences in the presentation of the name. The person making the cross gets to name the plant and they might register it.

Now, a subject that used to worry us. What is the correct pronunciation of the name? For example, is *Aechmea* pronounced “Ack mee a” or “Eck mee a” or what? A friend who was a long time plant grower gave us the best advice. “Just go for it. No one is going to hold a slight mispronunciation against you!”

So yes, names can be confusing. But with time, the genera names will become familiar. Then, just look at the plant for hints to what the species name might be. (reference: *The Name Game* by Joella Olson)

[This article by Joe Wujcik is reprinted from the January 2011 newsletter of the Saddleback Valley Bromeliad Society.]

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 sfbromeliad.org 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 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 Bromeliad Society International publishes the Journal bimonthly at Orlando, Florida. Subscription price (in U.S. \$) is included in the 12-month membership dues. Please address all membership and subscription correspondence to Membership Secretary Annette Dominiquez, 8117 Shenandoah Dr., Austin, TX 78753-5734, U.S.A. or go to www.bsi.org.

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