



A Caribbean Beauty

By Bryan Brunner, HSPR Editor & Webmaster

As suggested by its scientific name, *Heliconia caribaea* is native to the Caribbean Antilles islands. Its natural distribution stretches from the southernmost point in Grenada, through St. Vincent and the Grenadines, St. Lucia, Martinique, Dominica, Guadeloupe, Montserrat, Antigua and Barbuda, Puerto Rico, Hispaniola, Jamaica, and possibly Cuba. It is Montserrat's national flower, and the endemic Montserrat oriole (*Icterus oberi*) depends on the heliconia leaves to hang its woven nest.



HSPR's logo and Puerto Rico's only native heliconia, the yellow form of *Heliconia caribaea*.

Populations in the northwestern portion of the range have predominately yellow inflorescences, sometimes



The red form of *Heliconia caribaea*, found on the southern Antilles islands.

with a greenish or reddish tinge, while those found from St. Lucia south are mostly red. In Dominica, around the midpoint of the range, the two forms seem to merge and a large variety of colors and patterns, including combinations of green, yellow, and red, occurs.

Common names for *H. caribaea* include lobsterclaw, wild plantain (English), *balisier* (French), *guineo del diablo*, *guineo del indio*, *platanillo*, *guineo salvaje*, *pámpano*, *plátano cimarrón*, *plátano silvestre*, and *espada de Santa Bárbara* (Spanish).

Heliconia caribaea is found along

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Dates to Remember

- HSPR Meeting, 10:00 am, Sunday, June 14, 2009. Home of Dr. Edgardo Varela, Caguas, PR.
- Aibonito Flower Festival, June 26-July 5, 2009. Hwy 722, Km 6.7, Aibonito, PR.

A Caribbean Beauty (continued)



'Bonnie Kline' has an unusual inflorescence color pattern, and is a seedling that was selected and named in 2000 by HSPR member Sherry Ballester.

rivers, roads, and in forest light gaps at higher elevations in the Antilles, where temperatures are cooler and rainfall more abundant than in coastal areas. This understory herbaceous species has been shown to benefit from the canopy disruption and resulting increase in sunlight

penetration caused by the periodic hurricanes which are fairly common in the Caribbean.

This species was described by botanist R.F. Griggs in 1903 as *Heliconia borinquena*, named after *Borinquen*, the indigenous Taino word for the island of Puerto Rico, where he had previously found it growing. However, this name was invalid be-



'Green Tips' was grown from seed collected in Dominica and named in by HSPR member Sergio Tejedor.

cause Lamarck had already published the name *H. caribaea* in 1785.

The yellow form of *Heliconia caribaea* is the only heliconia native to Puerto Rico, and is found in the moist forests of the Cordillera Central, Puerto Rico's central mountain range. Many clones have red or green markings on them, especially as the inflorescence ages.



The exotic orange and yellow flowered 'Porto Rico' was raised from seed and named by HSPR president Héctor Méndez Caratini (Photo by HMC).

Named cultivars



'Springfield Estates' was wild collected in Dominica and named in 1997 by HSPR member Paul Yoshioka.

that are found growing in Puerto Rican gardens include 'Barbados Flat', 'Black Magic', 'Bonnie Kline', 'Canaries Giant', 'Chartreuse', 'Cream', 'Dominica Red', 'Flash', 'Gold', 'Green Tips', 'Pink', 'Porto Rico', 'Prince of Darkness' and 'Springfield Estates'.

From Our Last Meeting

Our yearly Invited Guest Educational Program is one of our most anticipated events. This year it was held during the March 8th meeting and was hosted by our dynamic team of West Coast members. The modern facilities of the University of Puerto Rico served as the ideal backdrop for our quarterly spring reunion. Approximately sixty persons took advantage of this educational conference. The Biology Auditorium and its terrace overlooking the Mona Channel, as well as the camaraderie of our members inspired us all. This particular educational conference was very important for our HSPR members, since it opened their eyes to other plants related to the Zingiberales family, which are rarely known to us. The enthusiasm was contagious.

Our deep felt gratitude goes out to Dr. Duane A. Kolterman, for arranging to perfection all the UPR ground logistics concerning this conference; also to Gildreth and Bob Castro who were in charge of the publicity and food for the event; as well as to the young volunteers Yahaida Camacho and Carlos Pasishe Lisboa - who worked incognito, backstage. Excellent team work! Again, we are very grateful to ALL of our West Coast members, who helped with the success of this important educational meeting. A round of applause goes out to them.

I would like to emphasize how important it is for our organization's success to work together, as a coherent group. Team work is what it's all about. It's the foundation for larger, much more complicated, future scenarios, which we have in scope, such as: the Heliconia Society International Conference 2012, to be held (tentatively) in Puerto Rico – a project I am currently working on.

Dave Skinner, our invited guest, came all the way from Tallahassee, Florida, to lecture us on Costaceae. His beautifully illustrated PowerPoint presentation, on little known Costaceae (costus family), impressed us all. He presented over fifty spectacular color photographs of seldom seen costus inflorescences. His lecture lasted over an hour and we vicariously traveled with him to the remote jungles of Central America to discover the amazing world of costus. You are all welcomed to browse Dave's extraordinary web site at www.gingersrus.com.

Professor Skinner has kindly allowed us post his enlightening conference on our web site at: www.heliconiasocietypr.org/Neo-Tropical%20Costus-HSPR.pdf. For those of you who missed it, this is your chance to catch up. For those international members who

live elsewhere, in the rest of the planet, this is an excellent opportunity to catch up with our educational programs. We deeply appreciate Mr. Skinner's generosity, his unforgettable conference and the donation of twelve different varieties of recently discovered costus specimens. The specimens, which he collected in the wild, were distributed among the eight Heliconia Society International / Heliconia Society of Puerto Rico Coop Conservation Centers (CCs) which were present at the meeting.

Our special thanks to Dr. Bryan Brunner, his wife Yarisla and their sons, and to Nancy and Dr. Sergio Tejedor, for hosting our invited guest and his wife Karen at their lovely country homes; as well as to Sherry Ballester for showing them our treasures. Dave and Karen also stayed overnight at my farm in Aibonito and later on visited Old San Juan, in their last afternoon in Puerto Rico. They got to know first hand the exotic tropical vegetation that Puerto Rico has to offer, the one that tourists seldom ever see. For several days, Dave and Karen traveled together from San Juan to Mayagüez and later on, all the way back east through the winding roads of the refreshing Cordillera Central.

While visiting us, Mr. Skinner was able to collect several different varieties of costus growing in our farms, which he did not have in his private collection. One was *Costus speciosus*, commonly called "insulina" by the locals, who boil the leaves and drink the brew as a tea - a folkloric medicinal ailment that helps to control diabetes.

Three weeks later, on Tuesday March 31st, TV reporter Sylvia Gómez (from Channel 2) transmitted a five minute televised special on the importance of our HSI / HSPR CCs. The program was filmed entirely at Dr. Edgardo Varela's impressive, lusciously landscaped farm. Present during the recording were Dr. Sergio Tejedor, Dr. Arnaldo Astacio and myself. We all talked about the importance of our Conservation Centers in our quest of conserving and propagating heliconias and other Zingiberales for the well being of the planet. Lots of interested persons called us afterwards soliciting more information.

Again, the plant Raffle was a success. There were many different samples of Costaceae up for grabs. The money generated from the Raffle helped to pay (in part) the expenses associated with our educational conference.

Héctor Méndez Caratini
President, HSPR

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HSPR

*Promoting Zingiberales in
Puerto Rico since 1996.*



The Heliconia Society of Puerto Rico, Inc. was founded in 1996. The objectives of the society are to stimulate and promote the enjoyment and understanding of Heliconia and related plants of the order Zingiberales through education, research and communication, and to interact with the Heliconia Society International and other institutions which share similar interests, purposes or objectives.

New Heliconia Website



President's Corner

Our pésame / condolences goes out to Bob Castro (and his family) who recently lost his mother. May she rest in Peace.

For our June 14th meeting, Mr. Efrain Vega, HSPR Member, has agreed to give us a talk on Bromeliads. This way, our ever curious members will continue to gain more knowledge on other type of plants worth collecting, motivating them to expand their horizons, their ever growing collections of heliconias, gingers, costus and other exotic tropical flowers. Mr. Vega will talk about: the origins of the species, their different genres, their means of propagation, treatment for diseases, how to fertilize them, and much more. Also, at Dr. Varela's farm there is an extraordinary private collection of bromeliads, not to be missed.

As always, we're asking our members to bring as many plants and rhizomes as they can for the Raffle, as well as, refreshments and food for the informal potluck lunch. Our customary Show and Tell session will also be held. So don't forget to bring your treasured rare plants for us to see.

Hoping to see you soon, at our next summer meeting, to be held at the world famous Varela Farm, which promises to be another highlight event. This site is located on top of a mountain, with an impressive view overlooking the Cagüas valley, all the way east to El Yunque!

Try to make it. You will not regret it.

Saludos a tod@s,

Héctor Méndez Caratini
President, HSPR



The Puerto Rican Emerald hummingbird (*Chlorostilbon maugaeus*) feeds on the native *Heliconia caribaea* as well as flowers of other heliconia species (Photo by Alcides Morales).