

# THE HSPR NEWSLETTER

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## FROM YOUR BOARD

The Board of Directors met briefly immediately following our September meeting at the finca of German Charron in Corozal. A number of items were discussed and are reported here for your information.

It was agreed that, due to a scheduling conflict with the Plebiscite, the date of our next meeting was changed from December 13 to the first Sunday of the month, December 6. (See Announcements below).

The need for an HSPR logo was discussed. There was general agreement to proceed in this and to hold a design competition during 1999. The guide lines and rules for the competition will be announced at a later date. Meanwhile suggestions from members would be appreciated.

The Board also discussed the possibility of publishing an HSPR brochure which would describe the purposes and goals of the Society and introduce the public to the fascination and beauty of the Zingerberales. It was generally agreed that the expense of producing such a color brochure was not warranted at this time but would remain as a desirable undertaking in the future.

Additional items on the agenda included the need to expand the Newsletter distribution list to include selected institutions and organizations as well as relevant individuals. The President agreed to prepare cost estimates for the additional mailing. Also discussed before adjourning the meeting were the problems of identifying future speakers and venues for our meetings.

## THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER

In the last issue of HSPR Newsletter, I began the first of a two part series on my views of the poor state of development of ornamental horticulture in Puerto Rico. Rather than continue this particular theme in the present Newsletter, I've decided to postpone my comments for a later issue and substitute some thoughts that have been crystallized by the advent of "Georges", and its aftermath. It has been described as a "Hundred Year Storm" which, unlike "Hugo" and "Hortensia", affected the entirety of Puerto Rico leaving nothing and no one untouched. "Georges" was one bad actor -- a maniac on the loose -- the Exterminator running amuck. However you wish to think of the night of September 21-22, it was a natural disaster of humongous proportions and unprecedented assault on the environment. No argument there !! And as we view the devastation in our fincas, our gardens and our patios,

again no argument about it being a bad scene. No more hurricanes, thank you.

But how bad is bad ?? Is a natural disaster the end of things ?? It certainly seemed so at the moment. But within five days after the wind died, nature's recovery machine was in place and operating. I first noticed new leaves and branch buds on the mangos and the yagrumos (cecropias). Other shrubs and trees soon followed suit -- but some were so damaged they couldn't make it. And now, almost two months since the storm, the plant kingdom is back in full operation. Amazingly, the gray and destitute landscape of only a few weeks ago now is green and vibrant with almost no indication of passage of a violent storm. Further, I have the distinct impression that the biological stress generated by the hurricane has resulted in even greater photosynthetic activity and elevated primary production of biomass than during normal non-stressed times. So the question again is, "How bad is bad ?". Or to put it in another context, "Does biological stress from disasters provide a beneficial stimulus to affected ecosystems?. Or even more specific, "Are natural disasters integral and necessary components of a successfully functioning environment?.

My feeling is that bad, like beauty, is in the eyes of the beholder. Certainly it is bad to suffer losses to our home and property -- and to be deprived of the convenience of public utilities. But at our home, the heliconias, gingers, orchids, in fact all our plants are prospering with vigorous new growth, some even showing "stress flowering". And thinking about the business of bad this, bad that which seems to be one of the symptoms of post-hurricane depression (the Ph.D. syndrome), I began to recall other examples of what seem to be environmental disaster requirements. Two will illustrate my point.

Three years ago, forest fires broke out in Yellowstone National Park -- and many other places for that matter. There was immediate and widespread public demand to "save Yellowstone". Quickly hundreds of fire fighters and impressive technologies were employed by Park officials. These efforts, aided by falling temperature and rain, finally extinguished the fires. Yellowstone had been saved ! Good ! Or was it? According to forest ecologists, such activity could be interpreted to be poorly considered at least if not actually counter-productive in that man's intervention obstructed a natural system of checks and balances required for the ongoing health and evolution of the forest ecosystem. Without disaster and recovery, ecologists say, forests become stagnant and senile, an enigmatic situation where bad become good.

Another example comes from my years of experience as a geologist working primarily in sedimentary deposits and the processes of their formation. A case in point are the coral reefs of the world's tropical oceans -- the Great Barrier Reef of Australia or the massive systems of the Caribbean coasts of Yucatan, Belize and Honduras, even the smaller oceanic atolls. All have a common characteristic -- the reefs occur in shallow marine waters in the world's tropics. Ecologic studies demonstrate intricate and finely tuned interrelationships between the various communities of organisms which compose the reef and the surrounding aquatic environment. But such delicate balances characteristic of the tropical reef environment are often shattered by such natural disturbances as hurricanes or typhoons. Vast areas of reef may be completely destroyed in hours by hurricane waves which literally rip up tremendous quantities of living reef. Further destruction may come from floods of fresh, silt-laden waters from torrential hurricane rains. But the reef normally recovers and grows back vigorously -- admittedly not as vigorously as the recovery of our yagrumos, our robles or our heliconias -- but reefs do come back. And, predictably, they will be destroyed again. Such repetitions are well illustrated to geologists who study ancient reefs - some dating back hundreds of millions of

years. It has been my experience, and that of colleagues, that ancient reefs are identified not so much by the form and structure of the classic coral reefs described by Charles Darwin, but rather by a haphazard accumulation of reef debris -- rubble, chunks, even giant blocks of reef carbonate deposited in chaotic disorder. Only rarely do we see preserved reef material in growth position. Simply stated, a fossil reef is a testament to the destruction - recovery process, so typical of large ecosystems.

And now Hurricane Georges is history, a bad dream. And I have no desire for a second show. But we are all witnesses to the near-incredible recovery of an ecosystem after its nearly total destruction. Such recovery points to a bright future. So maybe there really is a happy ending to the events of the Fall Equinox of 98. Our plants are growing well, the broken trees and trash are mostly cleaned up, and I now have an unobstructed view of Mona Channel. My present contentment will become even more complete when water, electricity, telephone and cable are eventually restored to Chez Lankford.

Best wishes, Bob Lankford

#### NEWS BRIEFS

##### More On The Pink Mealybug.

Since the August publication of HSPR Technical Contribution No. 1 in Newsletter No. 3, additional information has been received regarding the Pink Mealybug (*Maconellicoccus hirsutus*) here in Puerto Rico. Both USDA-APHIS and PR Department of Agriculture have confirmed its presence not only in Culebra and Viequez since early this year but somewhat later in the Fajardo area. Subsequent APHIS surveys suggested that the pest was moving south toward Humacao rather than into the Caribbean National Forest at El Yunque. The key word here, is "suggested". Following the passage of Hurricane Georges, Rene Colon reported to Bob Lankford that PRDA surveys in the Fajardo area "indicate" (another key word) that the mealybug had disappeared from sites where it previously had been found. Rene hastened to add, however, that hurricanes are not being advocated as pest controls. In any event, it seems that the Pink Mealybug is a new although unwanted addition to the fauna of Puerto Rico.

If you see or have knowledge of this dangerous pest, please contact your CES agents and / or the following addresses and telephone numbers:

PR DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, Plant Quarantine Program, P.O. Box 10163, Santurce, PR 00908-1163, Tels: 722-5301, 724-0422 Fax: 722-3447

USDA - APHIS, Plant Pest Survey Office, 504 Ponce de Leon Ave. # 5, San Juan, PR 00905, Tels: 729-6612 (recording service), 729-6926 Fax: 729-7470

### Amendments To The By Laws.

The Society voted to amend the HSPR By Laws during our regular meeting on 13 September 1998. The changes had been previously proposed in HSPR Newsletter No. 2 and discussed during the June meeting. The accepted amendments are:

(1). in Article 3, Members; to add Family Member to the three existing membership categories: Regular Member, Student Member, and Honorary Member.

(2). in Article 7, Society Meetings, Regular Meetings, to change the meeting day to the second Sunday of designated months.

At a later date, the new wording of the amended Articles will be distributed to all members.

## HORTICULTURAL NOTES

### Diseases In Heliconias.

We have recently obtained a copy of Diseases of Heliconia in Hawaii by Sewake and Uchida. This University of Hawaii publication undoubtedly will be of vital interest to all growers of heliconias whether hobbyist or commercial grower. The Editors are pleased to provide the following information for those who may wish to obtain a copy.

Published in April, 1995, this 18 page booklet is probably the first effort to bring together available technical information of heliconia diseases in a single volume. The publication documents a number of fungal and bacterial pathogens known to infect heliconias in Hawaii. The diseases are grouped into three categories: (1) Foliage Diseases Caused by Fungi; (2) Rhizome and Root Diseases Caused by Fungi; and (3) Diseases Caused by Bacteria. The diseases of each category are identified by scientific name and are described according to: Disease and symptoms; and Biology and spread. In addition, there are sections describing: Fungal Disease Cycles and Control; Bacterial Disease Control; and Nematode Control. The text is well illustrated with 40 excellent color photos, and there is a list of cited literature.

Ordering information:

Title: Diseases of Heliconia in Hawaii

Authors: Sewake, Kelvin T. and Janice Y. Uchida

Date: April, 1995

Reference: Research Extension Series 159

Cost: One copy = \$ 4.00 + \$ 2.00 S + H = \$ 6.00

Send check or M. O. payable to: RCUH

To: Publication and Information Office

3050 Maile Way, Gilmore Hall 119

Honolulu, HI 96822-2271

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### Next Meeting of HSPR.

The next meeting of the Society will be held on Sunday 6 December, 1998 starting at 10:00 AM. The venue is the home and garden of Martha and Bob Lankford in Mayaguez. A location map is appended for your use.

Since this is our last meeting of the year, the business part of the meeting will be brief, reserving time for opportunities to report of the effects of the recent storm, for our first annual Plant Show, Sale and Exchange, and a Puerto Rican Christmas Buffet. There will also be an opportunity to walk around the Lankford's garden -- or at least what's left of it. Since this will be primarily a year-end social activity, no speaker is scheduled. However, time will be made available for horticultural questions and answers. More details of the Plant Show, Sale and Exchange are given below.

### HSPR Annual Plant Show, Sale and Exchange.

This will be our first attempt to conduct this kind of activity -- and as such it will be an experiment of sorts. The idea was proposed by the Board last December as an intended break from our usual meeting structure. Its success, of course, will depend on the membership's interest and participation as well as the organizational leadership of Sherry Ballester, who will be in charge.

As the heading of this announcement indicates, there will be three components of this activity. One is an opportunity for anyone to show or demonstrate a plant or plants of particular interest or merit. Second is for persons to sell their plants at marked prices; and Third is for those individuals seeking not to sell but simply to exchange plants with others at any agreed upon basis. Since this is our first experience, both Sherry and the other Board Members will welcome your comments and any suggestions for improvement.

### Tropical Plant Industry Exhibition (TPIE).

The Florida Nurserymen and Growers Association (FNGA) have announced the dates and program for the annual TPIE, one of the truly outstanding horticultural events in this hemisphere, if not in the world. This years exhibition again will be held in the huge Broward County Convention Center in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. The show dates are Thursday through Saturday, January 21, 22 and 23, 1999.

This year's program includes a wide variety of activities ranging from educational sessions eg: the Interior Landscaping Conference and review classes and FNGA certification exams; bargains during the All Star Foliage Auction, opportunities to network with attendees, and, of course, the highlight of the show, TPIE's New Plant and New Products displays by hundreds of exhibitors and vendors.

For further information from TPIE organizers, write to: Florida Nurserymen and Growers Association, 1533 Park Center Drive, Orlando FL 32835-5705, or call: 800-375-3642.

The Members' Forum.

As originally conceived, the Members' Forum is basically a "show and tell" operation. Time would be set aside at the end of meetings for any individual to share something of interest or concern with the group. It would also be an opportunity to ask questions, to get information about a plant, a technique or a problem. So far, this particular activity hasn't really gotten off the ground. The Forum still seems like a good idea, however, and members are encouraged to take advantage of this interesting and potentially rewarding program.

TECHNICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

This section will be an occasional part of HSPR Newsletter and will include both original and reprinted information of interest to the Society. Members are encouraged to contribute material for this part of the Newsletter, bearing in mind that we must have the publisher's or author's permission to reprint copyrighted material.

The appended Technical Contribution No. 2 is entitled: "Propagacion de Heliconia caribaea (Lam.) por Cultivo de Tejido", by Arnaldo Astacio Diaz et al. This original material is from the master's dissertation (University of Puerto Rico at Mayaguez) of HSPR member, Arnaldo Astacio, and reports pioneering research on tissue culture of Puerto Rico's only native species of heliconia, H. caribaea. The Newsletter is grateful to the authors for the opportunity to share this most important horticultural advance.