

# THE HSPR NEWSLETTER

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## FROM YOUR BOARD

Summer vacation time seldom is a good time to have meetings, what with people traveling here and there. This certainly has been the case with the HSPR Board -- no meetings to report in the Newsletter. There has been sporadic telephone or incidental contact between the members when HSPR business and activities have been discussed which, among others, has included ideas or thoughts about how our Society is progressing, where it is succeeding or failing, what we should be doing to make it better, etc. etc. It is this general theme that has prompted us to ask Jan Crespo to moderate a discussion session at our next meeting on September 12th. We certainly hope to have a wide and meaningful participation in these discussions.

Such input will be invaluable to the Board in its efforts to guide HSPR along its way to the future. For those members who will not be able to attend the September meeting, you are encouraged to contact any of the Board member with your suggestions or ideas for a better future. We most sincerely want the input of all members.

The telephone of the Board members are:

President:	Bob Lankford	833-8821
Vice President:	Bryan Brunner	265-3852
Secretary/Treasurer:	Martha Lankford	833-8821
Counsellor:	Sherry Ballester	827-2637
Counsellor:	Judy Nelson	839-2040
Counsellor:	Rafael Benitez	723-7769

## THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER

It has been said that Man and his domesticated cat have at least one characteristic in common -- both are blessed (or cursed) with an inordinate amount of curiosity. We seem always to be sticking our inquisitive noses into this or that -- a condition with usually unpredictable and sometimes astonishing consequences. And so it was with two HSPR members, Paul Yoshioka and myself, when we decided in late July to look around the Lesser Antilles for new and interesting heliconias and, of course, anything else that caught our fancy. Due to some time restrictions, we selected only Grenada and Dominica -- Grenada because it is reportedly the botanical cross-roads of Caribbean and South American floras, and Dominica because a large percentage of its area is still unmodified tropical rain forest. The trip was such a fantastic experience, I decided to share some of the highlights with HSPR's members. I have divided the account into two parts, Grenada in this issue, and Dominica in the next Newsletter.

Paul and I left San Juan on LIAT on July 27 bound for the Cuban - built airport in Grenada, arriving at 9:30 PM (a long trip), and settled in at Roydon's Guest Lodge. Through a previous arrangement, our guide and driver, Gordon Pascal, met us the next morning and we first visited John Criswick at his Mt. Rose Nursery -- really a tropical botanical reserve of huge proportions and diversity. John kindly showed us through his extensive plant collection and, very importantly, gave us an excellent orientation about where to go and what to look for in Grenada. And off we went "Into the wild green yonder". It was immediately apparent that one of our smartest moves was to have hired Gordon as guide and driver. He not only seemed to know most of the people on the island but he could find roads which were never on maps.

The principal purpose of our visit to Grenada was to look for interesting varieties of H. bihai and the H. caribea x H. bihai, established by John Criswick and Fred Berry. The Grenada c/vs of the latter (in Berry and Kress) include the following: 'Carib Flame', 'Criswick', 'Grand Etang', 'Grenadier', 'Jacquini', 'Vermillion Lake' and 'Yellow Dolly'. We found an amazing variety of H. bihai in relative abundance; the caribea - bihai crosses were less evident and less abundant. By the second day of exploring, it began to dawn on us that we had seen no natural stands of H. caribea -- anywhere. True, there was a cultivated field of a dark red H. caribea (confirmed by the Ministry of Agriculture to have been imported -- from St. Lucia possibly), and later along a road in a nutmeg plantation, we found another clump of dark red H. caribea, growing next to H. wagneriana and a deep red H. stricta, two very obvious imports to the eastern Caribbean. So to repeat, we were unable to find any natural stands of H. caribea.

So what do we have here?? Lots and lots of color varieties of H. bihai, and some varieties of the less abundant form called H. caribea x H. bihai -- but NO H. caribea!! Flash!! The light comes on!! The dawn comes!! How can you have a H. caribea x H. bihai cross without H. caribea to do the "x-ing"?? Good question!! What's the answer?? You might visualize a highly motivated, supercharged humming bird flying down from St. Lucia with a load of pollen -- St. Lucia being the southernmost island known to have naturally occurring H. caribea. For me, the energetic humming bird hypothesis stretches the imagination a bit too much. Or you might postulate that H. caribea had lived in Grenada in the past, had cross-pollinated with the local H. bihai, and later was selectively wiped out by disease or whatever. This possibility also is a stretch since it requires that the cross-pollinated off spring of the vanished H. caribea were indeed fertile in order to continue the hybridized population -- a condition that contradicts the conventional view that heliconia hybrids are reproductively sterile. So far, we are not doing too well with viable solutions to the question of origin -- a not uncommon situation in life.

But another possible explanation of these problematical plants comes to mind. Maybe -- just maybe -- the so called H. caribea x H. bihai hybrids are not hybrids at all, despite their morphological similarity to both suggested parents. It is possible that we are dealing with a distinct and as yet undescribed species. Somehow I don't feel warm to this idea. It does seem more logical that these seeming orphans are simply variants or even a subspecies of H. bihai. Frankly, I would favor the latter -- the variant or subspecies possibility, this being based on nothing more than morphological comparisons and a strong hunch which is hardly a sound scientific conclusion.

So you see what happens when you get nosy and lift up a flat rock -- all kinds of things crawl out. What seems to be needed now to solve the H. caribea x H. bihai question is to catch the attention of a geneticist and tickle his or her curiosity to the point where some karyotyping or even DNA fingerprinting can be brought to bear on the problem.

This travel log, or whatever you wish to call it, will be continued in the next Newsletter -- covering our visit to Dominica, possibly the last of the tropical island paradises, and the home to an incredible variety of H. caribea. For the potential visitor, there will also be a list of contacts and telephone numbers. Meanwhile, will a real DNA fingerprinter please stand up.

Best wishes to you all, Bob Lankford.

## HORTICULTURAL NOTES

### Starting Rhizomes -- A New Twist.

Whether they be heliconias or any other herbaceous plants, it has become evident that planting newly acquired, unstarted rhizomes invites a degree of loss. In view of the often high cost of certain species or varieties, such losses are to be avoided whenever possible. One technique to jump - start rhizomes has been to place them in moist sphagnum moss until new rootlets are growing strongly and then pot them in soil or mix until new shoots are well developed for later planting in the ground. But unfortunately, even this system has produced its share of failures.

In order to beat the odds, HSPR member, Paul Yoshioka, has experimented with a variation of the sphagnum moss system that looks quite promising. The following is a brief description of his new twist.

- 1). Mix dry parts of milled peat (peat moss) and coarse river sand in a ratio of 2 to 1;
- 2). Add sufficient water to the mix to form a thick slurry -- like cement;
- 3). Fill a one or two gallon pot about ¼ full (3 or 4 inches) with the peat - sand slurry;
- 4). Place a 2 - 3 inch layer of moistened sphagnum moss on top of the slurry;
- 5). Put your rhizome (ideally dipped in a fungicide) on the sphagnum layer;
- 6). Add additional moist sphagnum loosely around the rhizome;
- 7). Place the pot in a shaded locality and resist the temptation to remove the sphagnum every hour or even every day to check on the appearance of new and fragile rootlets.

Paul feels that the peat - sand slurry addition in the bottom provides a constant or steady humidity which encourages rootlet growth, and therefore better propagating results. He adds that this technique works well at his home and garden in Rosario which is definitely a humid area. He cautions, however, that this particular technique may require more careful attention to the humidity factor in other growing conditions.

The Newsletter thanks Paul for this important information -- and invites similar contributions from others. (Ed.).

## MEMBER'S FORUM

The following is a letter written to Bob Lankford by Jan Crespo, which was read to the Society at its June 1999 meeting. Since the contents of her letter bear directly on the planned discussion of our future (see "From Your Board" above), it is reprinted here in Member's Forum for your information.

"We are truly sorry to be absent from today's meeting, but as some of you know, Rafael Jr. is graduating from the UPR and we did not want to miss that! He has been accepted to the School of Landscape Architecture at the University of Pennsylvania - an enthusiasm which grew out of his interest in tropical plants and their uses - the HSPR playing an important role there - we hope he will return to add to the beauty of our landscape.

Now, since I've been asked by our President Bob to lead an open discussion at the September meeting on the goals of our Society, I wanted to throw out a few of my own preoccupations just to get the ball rolling.

Looking back to March 1996, we declared that the purpose of the Society would be to promote the cultivation of heliconias in the island and to disseminate information on how to cultivate them. At a later date we entertained such ideas as a research center, seed and germplasm bank, an information center that might be world-wide (a web site?), and support for the commercial aspect, and maybe a few more. Actually, all sounded pretty good. Maybe it was too much at once for our young group. Hopefully, with time our thoughts have gelled a bit and we could consider just where to best direct our energy. I suspect we have a good deal of not only energy, but knowledge and talent.

I myself have always dreamed of a tropical garden center, with a meeting place with an enviable library and, of course, a fabulous world-famous garden known for its shady paths meandering through calatheas and ginger leading on to glorious hills with birds of paradise, and then the grand collection of heliconia, humming birds darting overhead all the way.

This would be a destination for scientists as well for garden tourists and local enthusiasts alike. Admission fee, gift shop, restaurant? I know what you're thinking - we need a heliconia enthusiast-philanthropist!

Anyway, that's my vision - and I'll be looking forward to hearing about yours in a lively discussion in September!"

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### Next Meeting of HSPR.

The third regular HSPR meeting in 1999 will be held at 10:00 AM, Sunday, 12 September. The venue will be at Fundacion Luis Munoz Marin located in the San Juan home of the former governor. A location map is attached for your convenience.

Following a short business meeting and the discussion session on the future of HSPR, we will be treated to a video tape presentation of Heliconia species and varieties by Dr. Raymond Gerome. He is a well known Heliconia enthusiast, having not only an extensive collection in

cultivation but has traveled to Hawaii and elsewhere to document and to capture on tape the outstanding diversity of this most impressive genus. HSPR is privileged to have Dr. Gerome on the program.

Please note that folding chairs will not be needed at this meeting. And following recently adopted policy, meals per se will not be provided. However, coffee and light snacks will be served thanks to Bessie Ceinos and Jan Crespo.

Don't forget that there will be our usual Member's Forum and also the Plant Raffle and Exchange under the supervision of Sherry Ballester. See previous Newsletter for the rules of the game.

#### Bryan Brunner Promoted.

Dr. Bryan Brunner, HSPR Vice President and UPR professor, is the new Chairperson of the Horticulture Department of the University of Puerto Rico at Mayaguez. Having served for a number of years as professor and also researcher at the UPR Experimental Station at Lajas, Bryan was appointed to his new position on August 2 by Dr. Rafael Davila, Dean of the UPR School of Agriculture at Mayaguez. His new office telephone number is 265-3852. HSPR congratulates Bryan and looks forward to working closely with him and the Horticulture Department in the future.

#### HSPR Logo.

A competition to design an acceptable logo for our Society was announced in the 1999, No. 1 of the HSPR Newsletter last March. The instructions for the competition stated that the members would jointly judge the entries at our last meeting of the year, in December. So far the response has been zero -- no entries have yet been submitted to the Board. Hopefully we will have entries in December or before. In any event, this is a reminder to all interested persons to design an outstanding logo.

#### Election of HSPR Officers.

Our present Board will complete its two - year tenure of office at the end of this year. New office holders therefore will be elected at our regular December meeting, tentatively scheduled for Sunday, the 12th, the time and place to be announced later. A nominating committee is working on a slate of candidates which hopefully will be announced at our September meeting, and by mail prior to the elections.

#### By Laws - Amendments.

The HSPR By Laws were amended by the membership at its regular meeting on 13 September 1998. A copy of the amended wording of Article 3.2 and Article 7.1 is enclosed and should be attached to your copy of the By Laws.

## AMENDMENTS TO THE BYLAWS

### Amendment No. I:

In Article 3.2. Categories of Members, the Society adopted the following amendments on 13 September, 1998.

i) Addition of member category; to read:

.3.2.b. Family Member. Two persons being 18 years or older who share the same mailing address and meet the qualifications in Article 3.1.

ii). Change in sequence of categories, to read:

.3.2.b. Student Member, shall become 3.2.c;

.3.2.c. Honorary Member, shall become 3.2.d.

### Amendment No. II:

In Article 7.1. Regular Meetings, the Society adopted the following amendment on 13 September, 1998.

i). Change in wording, to read:

. the phrase: "on the second Saturday ...", shall read: "on the second Sunday ...".