

# THE HSPR NEWSLETTER

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## MARCH MEETING

Thanks to the efforts of Bob and Martha Lankford, the March meeting of the HSPR will be held at HACIENDA BUENA VISTA (Carr. 10, Km 16.3, Ponce) from 9:30 AM to 1:00 PM on Sunday, March 12, 2000. HSPR has promised to donate heliconias and other plants to further beautify their grounds. These plants should be large enough for "planting out" immediately. So, if possible, PLEASE BRING ONE (OR MORE) PLANTS FOR HACIENDA BUENA VISTA!

## THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER

I wish to take this opportunity to officially thank Bob Lankford, along with Bryan Brunner, Martha Lankford, Sherry Ballester, Rafael Benitez, and Judy Nelson in overseeing the successful (and sometimes difficult) "birthing" of HSPR. I believe that the various official and unofficial interactions among the membership has successfully accomplished the major goals of our society; including (1) increasing and (2) maintaining our knowledge and interests in heliconias and other zingiberales, (3) as well increasing the knowledge and interest of the general public in these plants.

Please remember to pay your 2000 dues at the meeting (\$20 for regular members, \$10 for students). Alternatively, send your remittance to our Secretary/Treasurer Jannette Crespo at Box 23359 UPR Station, San Juan, PR 00931).

HSPR also needs volunteers to host, or suggest potential places, for future meetings beginning in September (Kelly and Susan Brooks, and Judy Nelson will be hosting the June meeting). We also need speakers - any volunteers?

As an alternative to prepared talks, a "round table" forum about various aspects of heliconias may be useful. I personally do not have the extensive and detailed "hands on" knowledge about specific aspects of heliconias (e.g., germinating seeds) that would be useful in presenting a talk. As is probably the case of most members, my personal experience is in the form of "bits and pieces". For instance, I find *Musa coccinea* and red Christmas (*H. angusta*) temperamental in the sense that they grow well in some spots but not in others. More frustratingly, I haven't been able to figure out the key factor responsible for this temperamental behavior. Perhaps somebody else in HSPR has. In any event, a membership forum on "Growing Problem Plants" may be most informative. Other forums could focus on germinating seeds (Can we get them to germinating sooner?), disease (Can we prevent clumps of Sexy Pink, *H. chartacea*, from eventually dying out?), and so on.

## GERMAN CHARRON'S TRIP TO COSTA RICA

[The following is an account of a trip that German Charron and some of his friends recently took to Costa Rica.]

The trip was originally conceived by our good friend Bonnie Oliver as a graduating gift for her daughter Adela; but with other interests in mind (mainly the desire to obtain new rhizomes of heliconias) the invitation was extended to other members of HSPR. As the date of departure approached, some members dropped out and others joined, as was the case of Ana and Freddy Vázquez. We took a direct flight and the time passed without complications. After arrival to San José we went directly to the hotel, and the rest of the night we dedicated to exploring the sights of the city.

Next morning we followed our plans: to get in touch with the distributors using the "data" in our hands. What followed was frustration because the information given to us in Puerto Rico was incorrect. We analyzed the situation and the first idea was to search in the telephone book for heliconia merchants; but the results were "nothing". "Go to the Central Market, there are hundreds of flower vendors" we were told at the office of the hotel and we followed the advice. Around the Central Market (a whole block around) vendors displayed the most beautiful varied flowers, but to our dismay none were heliconias. We asked about ten of the vendors and to our surprise none knew what heliconias were. By asking so many questions, we discovered that the Costa Rican people have a peculiar way of giving directions in terms of distances in meters from a known landmark; the results were often vague if not confusing to us, but the people were willing to help and one knew that there was a place called Costa Flores; in the province of Heredia at Limon; and that was the spot to search.

The next day we departed to Turrialba, a city right between those two provinces, that we wanted to explore. After we passed Cartago (Costa Rica's first capital) we started to discover the natural wonders of the country. The agriculture was extensive and diverse; the housing, very well constructed and with beautiful gardens. This showed us a "well-to-do" society in its step to reach a happy medium.

As we drove deeper inside the country, an extensive patch of yellow showed at either side of the road. Upon examination they turned out to be a wild bunch of *Calathea crotalifera*, ready to be picked up by anyone. "What an irony" I exclaimed, "just last week I paid ten dollars for a very small one." Doña Anna made another discovery, this time the patch was red and it was the biggest bunch of red lathispatas. Among them, and sticking their head out, were some giant yellow, of the same family. Very close to Turrialba we found in a distance of about a block, growing in an open area, about twenty pendant heliconias with flowers and some with seeds. With our book in hand, we could identify some as: *mutisiana*, *delsiana*, *pogonantha*, and *cudofontis*. By now our spirits were high "imagine how much these heliconias cost in San Juan, and here they could be had by the taking". With the car full of heliconia flowers we arrived at Turrialba; at the Hotel Panamericano. Bonnie was waiting for us.

The experience at Turrialba was another pleasant story. Doña Blanca, the owner, is a charming Costa Rican lady schooled in the USA. She became a very

willing helper in our endeavor. With her computer she became a detective and discovered for us, not only our two original companies, but also a few in Lion and another in Guapiles. This she did while we were exploring rivers, volcanos and mountains near Turrialba. Two of these companies, while advertising heliconias in P.R., list them as gingers in Costa Rica. This effort was a little too late, since we had also discovered a vendor that served us well, or so we thought at the moment.

But Turrialba was something else, a very small city but with big interests, not specifically related to heliconias, but with everything that concerns nature. CATIE (Centro Agronomic Tropical de Ensenanza) with two thousand acres devoted to research and teaching, deserves a close look.