



The Strelitziaceae

By **Ozzy Maldonado**, HSPR collaborator
(English translation by the Editor)

The family name Strelitziaceae is named in honor of the German Duchess Sophia Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz (1744-1818), who became queen after marrying England's King George III. She was a knowledgeable amateur botanist who helped establish what is now Kew Gardens in London, England.

This family is comprised of three genera; *Strelitzia* (birds of paradise), native to South Africa; *Ravenala*, from Madagascar; and *Phenakospermum*, which comes



The beautiful and well-known inflorescence of the bird of paradise (*Strelitzia reginae*).

from northern South America. The best known species is *Strelitzia reginae*, famous as a cut



The white bird of paradise, *Strelitzia nicolai*.

flower throughout the world and as an ornamental garden plant. It is one of the most well-known plants in the world and its fascinating flower is sold by the millions for flower arrangements.

The bird of paradise is a striking plant which forms huge clumps of rigid leaves that grow from the base. It grows very well in full sun or partial shade and can survive with little water once established. They are very tolerant plants and can prosper in most types of soil, although they prefer clay soils. They are also wind resistant and grow well in coastal gardens. They respond well to regular fertilization with slow release fertilizers and composts.

Propagation is by seed or division. Growth is slow and plants that are divided or transplanted can take up

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Dates to Remember

- HSPR Meeting, 10:00 am, Sunday, December 5, 2010. Farm of Bob and Gildreth Castro, Adjuntas, PR.
- HSPR Meeting, 10:00 am, Sunday, March 13, 2011. UPR Recinto Universitario de Mayagüez, PR.

The Strelitziaceae (continued)



The common orange bird of paradise, and to the left, the rarer yellow form, used as a mass garden planting.

to two years to reestablish themselves and begin to flower again.

Strelitzia nicolai is another good candidate for garden design, as is the elegant traveler's palm, *Ravenala madagascariensis*. *Strelitzia nicolai* is also called the white bird of paradise. It has a semi-woody trunk and leaves shaped like fans, similar to the traveler's palm. It forms clumps which can reach a height of 20 feet or more. The inflorescence has a dark blue bract and white sepals with a bluish petal. It grows well in full sun and tolerates partial shade. It prefers moist, well-drained soils rich in organic matter. It is propagated by seeds and division.



The huge inflorescence of the traveler's palm looks like a massive green heliconia.

Ravenala madagascariensis, native to Madagascar, is the only species in its genus. It is called the traveler's palm because weary travelers could quench their thirst with the reserves of water that accumulate in the leaf bases. It is important to stress, with common names such as this one, that this plant is not a palm, but instead a member of the Strelitziaceae family.

Although it prefers full sun, it also tolerates partial shade. It is adaptable to sandy or clay soils as long as it has good drainage. The trunk can reach a



An elegant specimen of the traveler's palm in the tropical landscape.

height of 30 feet and its long, intense green leaves and petioles are reminiscent of banana leaves. It is used extensively in landscaping, giving an exotic tropical touch to the garden.

The monotypic species *Phenakospermum guayannense*, known as *turriago* in Colombia, is

used for house construction in the Amazon by several indigenous communities like the Nukak-Makú. It is also used in the prevention of dental cavities and as a source of starch.

The author has worked as a general manager, consultant and landscaper for several landscaping companies in Puerto Rico. He also gives seminars and conferences to pharmaceutical companies, government agencies, schools and plant societies. He was a professor of Landscape Design and Maintenance at Turabo University, and produced the "Gardening Details" capsule on Channel 40. He is also a member of the Heliconia Society International. He is currently working on a book on the tropical flora of Puerto Rico. (all images by the author)

From Our Last Meeting

Our President, Dr. José Abreu Deliz, gave us the official welcome. Approximately 70 persons showed up for the September meeting, which was held at the beautiful house of Tita and Jorge Matta, in Caimito. Jorge gave us the formal welcome to his comfortable and spacious home. They have an incredible collection of orchids and bromeliads in their lush gardens.

Assistant Editor Bob Castro hand distributed the September issue of our HSPR Newsletter (it was still warm, off the press) to all the members present. This is a special issue, with more pages than usual, dedicated exclusively to this year's Heliconia Society International's activities, held in South East Asia. It documents our HSPR delegation's participation in this important international event.

Meanwhile, at the same time, the members were being informed that the 16th Heliconia Society International Conference had been successfully held in Singapore. There, renowned world authority on heliconias Dr. W. John Kress (from the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC) had been unanimously elected as the next HSI President. Also, that the Board of Directors had decided that dynamic Carla Black will coordinate the 17th HSI Conference, which will be held in her homeland, Panama. It has been tentatively scheduled for July 2012, with a pre-conference tour to the remote sites she has previously explored, where numerous native heliconias are found. The post-conference tour will be to Colombia, the country with the largest number of endemic heliconias in the world – with over 100 species! So, start saving today and plan for our next trip overseas.

While in Singapore, Dr. Abreu and myself approached Dr. Kress and invited him to be our next guest speaker at the Meet the Experts Conference. If he accepts HSPR's offer, we could probably have him address our members as early as six months from today, for our March 2011 meeting.

Reily Rodríguez gave the official report of our finances. Currently we have \$2,618.00 in the bank account – this is the amount left, after paying for expenses related to postage. In today's meeting,

\$457.00 was generated from the raffle and membership dues, for a grand total of \$3,075.00. Our Treasurer also informed us that he is still trying to register his signature (the official change, from the previous treasurer) at the bank and has also solicited our society's very own credit card – to pay for expenses related to our internet web site, which has been having more traffic than usual, every single month, having hit an all time high during July (after my presentation at the HSI Conference).

Our members were reminded how important the raffle is for our economic survival. The raffle is the main source for generating income. Dr. Abreu proposed that besides Zingiberales, new articles could be donated, such as: planting pots, fertilizer and decorative stones for gardens. It was also approved, by a majority of show of hands, to increase the membership dues, as well as to have a special admission charge of \$10 per member and \$20 for each invited guest to our annual Christmas Dinner (lechón asao, pasteles, arroz con gandules, etc). As stated previously, our fourth annual meeting will be held December 5th (not the second Sunday, as is the norm) at Gildreth and Bob Castro's magnificent HSI / HSPR Conservation Center, in chilly Cerro Guilarte, Adjuntas. Don't forget to bring your sweater.

Isabelita Wadsworth recommended that we should have an up to date directory of the members. She said that the list could be used to create a special committee, which could find out ahead of time how many persons will be attending the Christmas dinner – this way, we could plan ahead of time and avoid wasting too much precious food. Reily agreed to prepare such list and make it available to her (and the rest of the members).

Next, I gave a one hour illustrated Power Point presentation, titled "Malaysian Rose" (with 238 color photographs) of our delegation's participation in this year's 16th Heliconia Society International Conference, as well as images from the Pre-Conference Tour to Malaysia and the Post-Conference Tour to Borneo. Our members vicariously traveled in time, with us, through the jungles of this exotic tropical paradise. The presentation was held at Jorge's spa-

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PUERTO RICO, INC.**

www.heliconiasocietypr.org

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*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.

From Our Last Meeting (continued)

cious living room, where a huge high definition home theater TV was located. I am grateful to his two sons, which were very helpful “mounting” the lecture in their lap top computers. I also brought four books from the trip for our members to browse. Two of the books were of the national parks in Borneo, and the other ones about pitcher plants and the gingers of Sarawak.

After the lecture, new members were introduced to the group. Josie Pagán came all the way from Hatillo and Enrique Figueroa from Palmer, Rio Grande. We welcome them!

Lunch was followed by a traditional Puerto Rican style dinner, prepared by our incredible hostess Tita Matta and her two young assistants. She treated us to a home made, succulent asopao de gallina, two different kinds of arroz con tocino, amarillos (ripe plantains), a salad and other gourmet goodies.

We are all very grateful to Tita, Jorge Matta and their family’s contagious enthusiasm and endless generosity. It was a memorable meeting full of friendship and camaraderie. Nobody was allowed to leave the premises until the raffle concluded.

Héctor Méndez Caratini
Vice President, HSPR

President’s Corner

Greetings Friends!

Once again I invite you to join us at our next meeting, to be held on December 5 in the cold climate but warm hospitality of Bob and Gildreth Castro in Adjuntas.

On this occasion we don’t have a planned formal conference but maybe we can set up a panel of our more experienced members for questions and answers.

Again I would like to exhort you to bring plants for the raffle. Remember that they don’t necessarily have to be heliconias; they can be any kind of plant, fruit tree or ornamental.

Regarding the possible visit of Dr. John Kress as an honorable invited speaker at our March meeting, I would like to inform you that, thanks to the efforts of our companion Héctor Méndez Caratini, it is likely to become a reality. I will keep you informed.

See you in Siberia!

José R. Abreu,
President, HSPR