



Aibonito Flower Festival

The world famous Aibonito Flower Festival will be celebrated this year from June 27 to July 6, in the scenic mountain town of Aibonito, Puerto Rico.

Aibonito is called “The City of the Flowers”, and was founded on March 13, 1824 by Manuel Vélez. The town’s name is derived from the Taíno word “Jatibonuco”, which means “river of the night”.

The first flower festival was celebrated in 1969, and has been an annual event ever since. As they have for the past 18 years, Susan and Kelly Brooks and Judy Nelson of Marin Alto Tropicals will be there with their stunning display of heliconias and gingers.

This year there will be 34 growers participating, and as usual, each will prepare an exhibit. On June 26, the judges convene to observe and deliberate on the quality of plants and the professionalism of the exhibits, and to award ribbons and other prizes.

See you at the Flower Festival!



Marin Alto Tropicals heliconia display at the 2001 Aibonito Flower Festival.

Peruvian Heliconia Expedition

By Raymond Jerome, Officer HSPR

In May, in the spring of the year 2000, six very excited heliconia enthusiasts from Puerto Rico joined together to make a dual purpose trip to Peru. The group was composed of three women and three men. The first portion of the trip was to be a “sight-seeing” trip to the highlands of Peru, including Cuzco, that was once the capital of the Inca Empire, and then to

Machu Picchu, one of the last strongholds of the Incas. After Cuzco and Machu Picchu, the second portion of the trip was to make a river boat expedition into the Peruvian Amazon region, that lies between Ecuador and Colombia, to see what native heliconias we could find growing there. Both portions of the trip far exceeded all of our wildest expectations.

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Dates to Remember

- HSPR Meeting, 9:30 am, Sunday, June 22, 2003. Farm of Dr. Sergio Tejedor, Jayuya, PR.
- Aibonito Flower Festival, June 27-July 6, 2003, Aibonito, PR.
- Heliconia Society International Conference, August 3-7, 2004, San Juan, PR.

Peruvian Heliconia Expedition (continued)

All of the trip was planned and booked through Margarita Tours of Ft. Lauderdale Florida [phone # (954) 764-8274 / Fax # (954) 767-9567 for anyone interested in taking a similar trip in the future]. They take about 12 expeditions into the Amazon Basin each year. Some of their groups collect and log tropical fish, some reptiles, some plants, some insects, some are photography tours, and others are just for sight-seeing. They also take medical and scientific groups into the Amazon to be of help or for research projects. All of their tours are guided by excellent and expert tour guides who are all well versed in many different aspects of natural history and are extremely knowledgeable about the animal and plant life of the regions into which they travel.



Different forms of *Heliconia othotricha* found near Fortaleza, Peru.

After leaving San Juan, our flight took us to Lima, Peru, via Miami, Florida. We spent the first night in Lima. The next morning we took a plane to Cuzco. Cuzco is high in the Andes Mountains at an altitude of about 9,000 feet above sea level. The air is very thin at that altitude and one can be very easily exerted in the rarefied oxygen atmosphere. There are many Inca fortress remains still existing in this area. We toured the city and the surrounding Inca ruins; the most impressive of which were the ruins of the Inca Fortress, Sacsayhuan. The Incas quarried and carved stones constructing this edifice that are tremendous in size, weighing several tons, yet they were hauled there from local quarries and cut with primitive tools to interfit like the pieces of a puzzle. These massive stones were not all squares or rectangles, but were of all different shapes cut to custom fit against each other so tightly that no mortar was necessary to hold them in place.

After spending the night in Cuzco, we departed in the morning on the train to Machu Picchu. This has to be one of the most interesting and scenic train rides in the world. It takes one from the snow covered mountain peaks, with massive glaciers, along large raging rivers to steaming jungles at the base of Machu Picchu. A bus takes the tourist from the train station up to the Inca stronghold ruins at an altitude of about 8,500 feet above sea level. This has to be one of the most magnificently beautiful and peaceful locations of anywhere on planet Earth. If any of you reading this article ever get the chance to go there, I can not recommend it highly enough. It will be one of the highlights of your life. After leaving Machu Picchu, we spent the night in Cuzco and then returned the next day, by air, to Lima. The next day we took

a tour of the city of Lima and visited the Gold Museum. This museum has one of the largest collections of gold and antique Peruvian artifacts anywhere in the world and is well worth seeing.

The following day we flew from Lima to Iquitos, Peru. Iquitos is a large jungle city located on the banks of the Amazon River, that is about three miles wide at this point. There are no roads or highways into or out of Iquitos. The only way into or out of the city is by airplane, or by boat via the Amazon River. Our tour guide and naturalist, Dr. Devon Graham, met us at the airport, helped us to clear customs, and took us to our hotel for the night. The next morning we loaded all of our gear aboard a large motorboat, crossed to the other side of the Amazon, and proceeded downstream a short distance to a narrow neck of a peninsula between the Amazon River and its large tributary, the Napo River. We disembarked at this neck of the peninsula and loaded all of our gear onto motorized, three wheeled, rickshaws that were powered by motorcycles. These motorized rickshaws are the main mode of travel throughout Iquitos and neighboring towns. We all boarded these rickshaws and proceeded to cross the narrow neck of the peninsula to the town of Mazan where our large river boat, the Tucunare, awaited us. By not taking the river route around this peninsula, we were able to save about one day's time.

The Tucunare had sleeping accommodations for six guests plus those for all of the crew members. It had two bath rooms with showers and a chef who was unbeatable at preparing wonderful meals for us. All of the crew members as well as all of the inhabitants of this part of the Peruvian Amazon speak perfect Spanish. While we slept the first night, the Tucunare began its trip up the Napo River and its tributaries toward Ecuador. The next morning, we awoke to a gorgeous sunrise over the Napo. The sunrises and sunsets in this area are absolutely spectacular this time of year. Almost immediately, as the dawn brightened, we began to see heliconia plants growing in profusion on both banks of the river. Needless to say, we were ecstatic. Throughout our trip much of the river's banks were lined with large growths of red and yellow *H. marginata* and *H. episcopalis*. They were everywhere. We were in for many surprises. The first surprise occurred on our very first stop, the first day out. We had crossed the river, and gone upstream a little way from Mazan. We had docked at the



Heliconia chartacea.
Similar to a giant 'Sexy Pink'.

Peruvian Heliconia Expedition (continued)

site of a large growth of *H. marginata*. The inflorescence of one specimen that we found was much larger and longer than all of the rest. We thought that this was perhaps a *H. pastazae*, but later concluded that it was only a large variant of *H. marginata*. However, when we began to explore this particular plant's growth habits, we found that its rhizome lay almost five feet below the surface of the sandy river bank soil; almost at the water surface level of the river at this time of year. It was

at a remarkable depth for any heliconia rhizome to be found. Just a few yards away from this unusual *marginata* specimen, we found growing one of our most spectacularly beautiful red and yellow *H. stricta*. We found many different *strictas* of varying shapes and colors during our trip, but none were as beautiful as our first one. At this stop we also found some *H. juruna* and many *H. episcopalis*. Nearly all of these heliconias were growing in full sun either directly on the river bank or just a few yards inland from the bank.

On the next day we went further upstream on the Napo River and stopped at the small settlement of Tuta Pishco. We went uphill past the settlement onto ground at a higher elevation into a secondary forest. There we found several new varieties of heliconias from the previous day. In this lightly shaded forest we found what we termed large and small varieties of *H.*

velutina (based on the size of their inflorescence), several small clumps of the dwarf purple and green heliconia, *H. tenebrosa*, and a solid red *H. hirsuta*. In this same secondary forest, we found some growths of a huge variety of pink *H. chartacea*. These plants were about 25-30 feet tall with inflorescences reaching 5 to 6 feet in length.

After traveling up river all night, the next morning we stopped at the settlement of Fortaleza. It was here, in an upland secondary forest, that we found what we thought to be a new species of heliconia. It is not pictured in either of John Kress' heliconia books. It is about the size of a small *H. psittacorum*. However its growth habits are entirely different to those of *psittacorums*. Its inflorescence is huge in comparison to the size of the small plant. Its leaves are much less stiff and thick than are the leaves of *psittacorums*, and it does not appear to be invasive, like *psittacorums*, but rather grows in small isolated clumps. If this is a new species, we decided to name it *H. migdalia* 'Golden Sunrise', since its inflorescence is absolutely beautiful containing all of the various shades of sunrise coloration ranging from yellow to deep red, through the oranges and pinks. In this same area, we found



Migdalia Jerome with *Heliconia standleyi* in habitat.
Quebrada Huirrima, Peru.

growths of pink *H. orthotricha*, similar to 'She'.

The next day we stopped at the settlement of Quebrada Huirrima (5 km North of the town of Santa Clotilde). There, in dense secondary forest nestled between white and black water creeks, we found large stands of huge *H. standleyi*. These are the only heliconias of which I am aware that exudes from almost all of its bracts a clear mucinous slime which mostly covers the bracts. We could not tell if this slime was an insect deterrent, or a

pollinator attractor. For whatever use the plant has for this slime, it is very unpleasant for handling. To one side of this large growth of *H. standleyi*, we found what we considered to be our second unknown species of heliconia. It is a very large plant with inflorescences reaching to about 5 feet in length. The red and green bracts rotate around the central rachis, are upturned and present flowers that look like shrimp swimmerettes. We only found one specimen of this plant and, from the pictures from Kress' book, think that it may be *H. gigantea* from neighboring Ecuador, or *H. stilesse*. If it is neither of these, it may be a new unknown species. Near this same settlement at higher altitudes and a good way from the river we found growing in either young secondary growth or open fields numerous varieties of *H. orthotricha*, *H. stricta*, *H. hirsuta*, *H. irrasa*, and *H. schumanniani* (or *H. fred berriae*).

On our last day, near the settlement of San Felipe, we found numerous and different varieties of *H. orthotricha*, *H. hirsuta*, *H. lasiorachis*, and one we called Red Curaray, since it was found on the Curaray River. This later heliconia has a growth habit similar to *H. velutina* but the inflorescence appears to be totally red (no yellow). This also could be a new species.

This expedition and trip was fantastic, but the most memorable part of the trip were the Peruvian people and their children that live along the rivers. They are all extremely friendly and always offer to help in any way they can... no payment expected. The children here, I believe, are unique among the children of the world. Throughout this area, we saw absolutely no evidence of greed, selfishness, or animosity among any of the children. Whatever the people of this region do, in relation to raising their children, should be used as an example to the adults of the world on "how to raise children properly". If you ever decide to make a trip to this region of Peru in the future, I can guarantee you that you will not be disappointed.



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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.



Machu Picchu, Peru, the setting for Raymond and Migdalia Jerome's heliconia expedition. Read all about their exciting adventure starting on page 1.

From Our Last Meeting

Visitors to our last meeting included Dr. Felipe Osborne, Mr. Ernesto Otero, Mr. Luis Caraballo, Mr. Gary Rodríguez, Mr. Augusto Carvajal and Miss Aileen Rodríguez.

The President spoke about two formal requests for donations of heliconias. She was approached by Dr. Juan A. Rivero of the Mayagüez Zoo, and by Prof. Salvador Alemañy of the UPR Cayey Campus. Both requested the help of our Society to establish heliconia gardens. Miss Aileen Rodríguez, a graduate student from Cayey, spoke about the planned heliconia garden and its purpose.

The Heliconia Society International Conference for 2004 was discussed, and a special request was made to the membership to join Heliconia Society International and to participate in this important event. Dr. Endre Guttman of Zingiberales Gardens is coordinating the conference. He may be contacted at (787)767-6607 or by email at tcienadre@coqui.net.

Dr. Paul Yoshioka gave an interesting conference on "Biogeographic Barriers to Hybridization"; the summary of this lecture will be published in a future volume of the Newsletter. Mrs. Mary Strow submitted the Treasurer's Report, indicating that the HSPR account has a balance of \$3,648.80.

The meeting ended with the raffle of plants and a tour of the property.

President's Corner

We are all enjoying the new format of the HSPR Newsletter, the new look and the beautiful photographs. Dr. Bryan Brunner was officially appointed Editor in our March 2003 meeting, and he has done an excellent job with the previous and present issues. It is important to mention that, as busy as he usually is, he finds the time to put the Newsletter together, which is no easy job. Dr. Brunner is Director of the Department of Horticulture at the UPR Mayagüez Campus, co-owner of Montoso Gardens with his brother David, and a dedicated family man. We really appreciate his work and dedication, and hope he can continue editing the Newsletter for many years to come! Thank you, Bryan.

We are grateful to Dr. Paul Yoshioka and his wife Beverly for hosting our March 2003 meeting. We enjoyed his very educational lecture, the tour of his property with his vast collection of gingers and heliconias, and the beautiful water gardens.

Our meetings usually take place the **second** Sunday of the given month. For the June 2003 meeting, however, a change had to be made due to certain factors. So, instead of June 8 as scheduled, the meeting will be **June 22**. It will be hosted by Dr. Sergio Tejedor and his wife Nancy at their beautiful farm in Jayuya. A map and directions for finding the farm are included. Please try to be on time (9:30 am) and don't forget to bring at least one plant.