



Highlights from the HSI Trip to Panama, Costa Rica and Colombia

By Dr. José Abreu Déliz, HSPR Vice President, and Héctor Méndez Caratini, Secretary and Assistant Editor

On Monday, July 23, 2012 we flew from Puerto Rico to Panama City, to participate in the Heliconia Society International Pre-Conference Tour. Upon arriving at the airport, we were greeted by María Elizabeth Chávez (Arian's Tour General Manager), Juan Chávez and Ahmed (her loyal assistants). We were driven to our hotel, in an interminable traffic jam. In the afternoon, we were given a city tour, including the Casco Viejo (which is currently under renovation) and the new impressive, very modern, high-rise buildings by the shore.

The following morning we flew to David and from there on were driven in air-conditioned buses to Volcán, Carla and Ángel's sanctuary, at Finca Las Chichicas. At their retreat, we were met face to face with numerous heliconias we had only read or heard about. We were personally toured around by our incredible hosts in two groups and allowed to wander around



Carla and Angel's gorgeous gardens in Volcán, Panama.



Heliconia gigantea.

her meticulously manicured flower garden overlooking scenic Volcán Barú. After having been offered an exquisite lunch, we were driven to Cerro Punta (Panama's highest mountain, located at 2,000 meters above sea level). There, we visited the world renowned Finca Drácula and its diminutive black orchids. For us, the most memorable part of this segment of the trip was that we were allowed to collect as many seeds as we wanted of *H. lankesteri* (the yellow and red varieties), *H. nutans*, *H. burleana*, *H. bourgaeana*, and a newly discovered huge red heliconia inflorescence from the Cordillera Central region (tentatively named 'Rojona').

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Dates to Remember

- HSPR Meeting, 10:00 am, Sunday, September 9, 2012 Marin Alto Tropicals, Patillas, P.R.

Highlights from the HSI Trip (continued)



José "Falín" Abreu with an inflorescence of *Heliconia* sp. 'Rojona'.

While walking downhill from the grounds, Falín got attacked by a white Husky dog, which ripped his trousers. Luckily for him, he was not hurt in the incident. Afterwards, we checked-in at the lovely Los Quetzales, an eco friendly hotel with lots of hummingbirds, bird watching sunrises, dinner by the fireplace and a good night sleep in private Swiss style chalets.

Early the next day, we headed for Costa Rica, to visit the world famous Wilson Gardens, a private Conservation Center at Las Cruces Biological Station. After a four hour delay at the frontier, while waiting for permission to cross the border, an infor-



Falín's ripped trousers as a result of the dog attack.



Carla addressing the Heliconia Society International pre-tour group at her farm.

mal party was organized by our delegation at the local restaurant and several members happily danced to the beat of *cumbias* and *vallenatos*. We were finally allowed to enter the country and drove to the town of San Vito. There we visited the beautiful estate of Mr. Franklin, a prominent businessman, whose Paraiso de Heliconias is managed by only one efficient employee! That evening, we had dinner and slept at the wooden ecological cabins at Wilson Gardens.



Volcán Barú in Panama.



Annette with "La Chiva Loca".

Highlights from the HSI Trip (continued)



The Puerto Rican delegation at the post-tour of the Heliconia Society International Conference.

The following morning we toured the grounds, but were unimpressed by the lack of heliconias. Costa Rica is known as one of the main breeding grounds for heliconias in Central America. After lunch, we headed back for the border, on our way to Volcán, on preparation for the next day's flight from David to Panamá City. From the capital, we travelled in two buses to El Valle de Antón, to participate in the HSI XVII Conference.

the comfort amenities. The architecture has lots of stone masonry and is very elegant. The grounds are beautifully cared for. In the evenings, we had rum and beer welcoming parties, at our balcony every night, for the international delegations. We feel proud to welcome the addition of Colton and Cacci Collins to HSI, for following their father's pioneering footsteps. The two day conference presentations were varied. Our Puerto Rican delegation was represented by two main speakers: Dr.



Chris, Carla and Arden collecting on muddy trails.



Héctor collecting *Heliconia gigantea* and *Heliconia titanum*.

The main event was held at Hotel Los Mandarinos, a stately resort composed of independent two story high buildings, with suites, balconies, kitchens and all



Part of our Colombian military escort.

Highlights from the HSI Trip (continued)



Gustavo Morales.

tions can be accessed at HSI's web site: <http://www.heliconia.org/conference/Presentations2012.htm>

In between the two formal Conference days, we took a break to hike through Monumento Natural Cerro Gaital. Afterwards, we visited a local market, full of artisans and local plants. When the Conference ended, we embarked on a short flight to Cali, Colombia, for the Post-Conference Tour. It was the beginning of our most exciting adventure. In the evening we had a welcoming dinner, next to the Cali River. The next morning we were driven to Reserva Nirvana, where Sergio H. Botero (the owner) greeted us. He graciously al-



Heliconia oleosa.



Sergio Botero with *Heliconia sanctaethesae*.

Duane Kolterman and Héctor Méndez Caratini. Other countries represented were: Brazil, Venezuela, Panama, Hawaii, Surinam, Australia, Canada and the United States. The Conference's Power Point Presentations

lowed us to collect seeds and sold us other varieties, at a very modest price. At Nirvana, we saw rarely seen (by us) heliconias, such as: *H. sanctaethesae*, *H. obscurioides* (yellow), *H.*



Colton and Cacci Collins are the son and daughter of the late heliconia pioneer Mark Collins.

chrysochraspeda, *H. estiletioides*, *H. lozanoi*, *H. huilensis*, and many more. Sergio provided us with a delicious appetizing lunch.

Afterwards, we were driven, over the Andes mountain range, to El Queremal. There we spent two days searching for the legendary *H. titanum* and *H. gigantea*. During part of this trajectory, we were accompanied by a group of eight heavily armed military soldiers, who drove four motorcycles, and cared for our personal safety. Also, we visited Eduardo Calderon's country estate at El Refugio, which had more heliconias and local flora. On the road to El Choco, at 2,200 meters above sea level, we rode La Chiva Loca, a local, painted, folkloric, four wheel drive bus which allowed us to examine uncounted zingiberales in rural,



Heliconia fernandezii.

Highlights from the HSI Trip (continued)



Heliconia huilensis.

decade passionate effort, spearheaded by dynamic Alvaro Calonje Daly. The private grounds are impeccably kept and the collection, consisting of over 2,200 plants, is simply amazing! The vegetarian lunch was out of this world. On our way, to and from, Armenia, we saw endless sugar cane plantations (in

unpaved, muddy roads by the side of misty, mountain side cliffs.

The following morning we headed for Dolmetsch Arboretum. This reserve is the product of a three and a half



H. stilesii.

the valleys); as well as coffee and plantain plantations (in the mountains) growing by the side of the roads. The next morning, we visited Jardín Botánico del Quindío, founded 33 years ago by visionary conservationist Alberto Gómez Mejía. Professor Gustavo Morales, the Director of the Jardín Botánico de Bogotá, welcomed us to an impressive collection consisting of 75 native heliconias, which he collected himself over several years.



An unusual form of *Heliconia rostrata.*



Exotic arrangements at the Medellín Flower Festival.

Some of these were: *H. oleosa* (very oily), *H. reptans* (the inflorescence emerges at ground level), *H. mutisiana* (a new variety), *H. fernandezii* (two different colors), *H. burleana*, *H. osaensis*, *H. vaginalis*, *H. venusta*, *H. cordata*, *H. orthotricha* varieties, and many more. Again, we were allowed to collect seeds from Colombia's endemic species.



A red form of *H. regalis.*

We felt honored when Dr. Morales accepted our invitation to be our HSPR Guest Speaker, at next year's

Meet the Experts Conference. The huge mariposarium was full of colorful butterflies and the food catering, with local Colombian dishes, was mouth watering. Later on, the next day, we took a seven and a half hour drive to Medellín through mountainous curves. When we ar-



Carla with *Heliconia rhodantha.*

Highlights from the HSI Trip (continued)



Heliconia sp. 'Crocodile'.

Farewell Dinner at an excellent local restaurant.

Soon, we realized that after having been travelling together for two weeks, the HSI delegation had to return to their respective countries. On August the 7th, the dream was over. We promised to see each other again, in two years time, in Southeast Asia's far away islands



A beautiful traditional Panamanian mola.

rived, we found out that we were the Guests of Honor at La Feria de las Flores. ASO-HELICONIAS member Carlos Julio Torres (and his inseparable family) welcomed us. This is an extraordinary event full of extravagant flower arrangements. It is held annually at the centrally located Jardín Botánico de Medellín. That night,

we had our



Heliconia display at the Medellín Flower Festival.

of Bali and Java, on the other side of the world, in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, home of the next HSI Conference XVIII 2014.

We would like to express our most sincere gratitude to energetic Carla Black, whose talent, tenacity and strong will were capable of engineering this unforgettable, adventure filled trip. Also, to Emilio Constantino (our Colombian guide), untiring Christopher Calonje (Colombia Birdwatch), María (Adrian's Tours) and her extraordinary assistants Juan and Ahmed, who catered to our daily needs with a courteous and joyful smile. Without them, our experience would not have been as memorable. Overall, on this action packed eco-tourism trip, we saw 36 "new" varieties of heliconias (which we had not seen in person, only in books) and were able to collect seeds from the majority of them, to be grown in our precious HSPR Conservation Centers.



Heliconia rostrata x standleyi hybrid?



Indigenous Kuna woman of Panama.

From Our Last Meeting

By Héctor Méndez Caratini, HSPR Secretary



The gorgeous inflorescence of *Calathea spiralis*.

Mrs. Cointa's hospitality. She lent us the spacious and very comfortable facilities of the Centro Cultural Hormiga, where our educational conference was held. On that clear breezy day, the breath taking panoramic view, from the top of the mountain, extended all across El Valle de Caguas, all the way to El Yunque



Heliconia chrysocraspeda.

Our June meeting was held at the beautifully landscaped property of Dr. Edgardo Varela, between Caguas and Cidra. This 25 acre farm is one of eight precious HSI-HSPR Conservation Centers found throughout Puerto Rico. We appreciated

and beyond to the east. Dr Varela gave us the official welcome. Close to one hundred persons attended our summer meeting. There was an abundance of food (breakfast and lunch included) courtesy of Dr Varela, Isabelita Colorado de Wadsworth, Tita Matta, and other members. We are all very grateful to the team; as well as to Dr. Varela for his generosity and dedication to HSPR.

Treasurer Reily Rodríguez gave us the official report of the society's funds. After paying for past expenses, we now have approximately \$3,484.00 deposited in the bank. Plus the amount of income generated from this meeting, which was \$1,024.00 (\$539.00 from the Raffle and \$485.00 in membership dues). This is the highest amount of income generated, in one single day, in HSPR's history! Three new members joined our organization and several more paid their memberships dues.



Heliconia imbricata.

Among the new members was Carlos Ruiz, who had been absent for many years. We welcome them all. Afterwards, our President, Jorge Matta, presented the Educational Panel. It consisted of Dr José "Falín" Abreu Deliz and myself and we answered over one dozen questions on issues related to growing zingiberales. There was an exceptional exchange of ideas from our members, who felt they were also part of the panel discussion, with their interesting opinions to the questions posed by our charismatic President. Since this educational experience proved to be so successful, another one is in the agenda for our next quarterly meeting; but this time, with a different panel.

**HELICONIA SOCIETY OF
PUERTO RICO, INC.**

www.heliconiasocietypr.org

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HSPR

*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.

President's Corner

Our last meeting, held at Dr. Edgardo Varela's estate, was a success. We want to thank Dr. Varela for his hospitality and the tour conducted of his beautiful estate. We also wish to thank Dr. Abreu and Mr. Héctor Méndez for the panel held on heliconias that same day, as well as everyone who participated in such a pleasant discussion. Isabelita Colorado did a spot-on job with everything related to the meal.

On the other hand, the group of enthusiasts (9 members), myself included, who recently visited all or part of the XVII International Conference of the Heliconia Society International held in Panamá, Costa Rica and Colombia, were witnesses to an interesting activity. The trip was educational, and provided the opportunity to visit various natural reserves and estates that were simply impressive. In addition, we were able to share with enthusiasts from all over the world including Australia, Africa, Hawaii, the United States, Colombia, Costa Rica and Panamá.

In Colombia, along with Dr. Abreu and Mr. Méndez Caratini, we were able to make arrangements in order to invite to Puerto Rico either in March or June Mr. Gustavo Morales, well-known expert in heliconias. It is important to mention our gratitude to Mrs. Carla Black and Mr. Carlos Julio Torres for their attentions during the trip. In addition, Mrs. Carla Black and I were interviewed by Colombian television on the subject of heliconias, and we took the opportunity to promote the Heliconia Society International as well as the Heliconia Society of Puerto Rico.

We wish to remind you that the next meeting of the HSPR will take place on Sunday, September 9th at the estate of Judy Nelson and Susan Brooks in Patillas. For this meeting, we will have another educational panel on heliconias, which I'm sure will be of interest for all attending. As usual, we remind you to bring snacks and nice plants for the raffle. Please remember that NO pets are allowed at our meetings.

Cordially,

Jorge L. Matta Serrano
President, HSPR



A very impressive "chandelier" made of *Heliconia chartacea* 'Sexy Pink' is displayed at the Medellín Flower Festival.