



Heliconias in the Eastern Caribbean

By Bob and Gildreth Castro, HSPR members

On a recent Eastern Caribbean cruise, from March 20-27, we stopped at and explored three beautiful islands. Being interested in local heliconias we hired taxi drivers to drive us around looking for them (after explaining the drivers what heliconias looked like).

Our first stop was Dominica island. Of the three islands visited, this was the most beautiful and



A red and yellow *Heliconia caribaea* inflorescence on Dominica.



A beautiful *H. caribaea* growing wild in Dominica's Layou River basin, similar to 'Chartreuse'.

impressive. There were heliconias everywhere we looked, with whole mountains covered with different varieties. Due to the limited time available, we stopped in a few places along the road following the Layou River basin to take pictures and admire their beauty. Not all were blooming, but the caribaeas were everywhere. We identified a caribaea that looked like 'Chartreuse', a red one with yellow borders (similar to Yoshioka's 'Dominica Red') and an unidentified hybrid. Unfortunately others observed were out of the way and too far for pictures. Our taxi

Inside this issue:

Heliconias in the Eastern Caribbean	1
From Our Last Meeting	3
President's Corner	4

Dates to Remember

- HSPR Meeting, 10:00 am, Sunday, June 13, 2010. Farm of Isabelita Colorado and Frank Wadsworth, Comerio, PR.
- Heliconia Society International Conference, July 15-18, 2010. Grande Copthorne Waterfront Hotel, Singapore. With a Pre Conference Tour to Malaysia and a Post Conference Tour to Borneo.

Heliconias in the Eastern Caribbean (continued)



A bicolor *Heliconia bihai x caribaea* hybrid growing in the Grand Etang Forest in Grenada.

driver was very pleased with the short lesson we gave him on heliconias. He planned to impress clients with his newly acquired knowledge of the different varieties!

The second stop was the island of Grenada.

Along the roads we saw several areas

with plants with no flowers. We stopped at the Grand Etang Forest reserve and took pictures of two specimens. Those were the only ones in bloom.

Our third stop was Tobago, close to Trinidad. The only heliconia observed



This red beauty, probably a *Heliconia bihai x caribaea* hybrid, is growing wild in Grenada's Grand Etang Forest.



A specimen of *Heliconia bihai*, similar to 'Balisier', growing near Mount Dillon on the island of Tobago.

was bihai 'Balisier', and was only present at high elevation, specifically near Mount Dillon. There we also came across an interesting bromeliad growing on an old ceiba tree.

It is interesting to note that locals of the islands visited con-

sider heliconias as a useless pest and don't recognize their potential for a cut flower market. It is just a matter of collecting them in the wild; they don't even have to plant them.

We encourage anyone visiting the islands to go out and explore the countryside, especially if you like caribaeas and their bihai hybrids. You never know what new hybrid you might come across. If you do, please take pictures and if possible, note the approximate location so we can piece together their distribution patterns. It will be an interesting project to document speciation across the islands, and the different subspecies, hybrids and/or cultivars found in each of them. Of particular interest will be to further explore the islands of Guadeloupe, Dominica, Martinique and Saba, which might hold some surprises due to their topography and relative isolation.

From Our Last Meeting

Our President, Dr. José Abreu, gave us the official welcome. Close to 50 persons attended the March meeting, held at Yolanda Reyes' beautiful house in the outskirts of Humacao. Yoli welcomed all of us to her spacious "Jardín Botánico de Bolsillo" (as she calls her backyard), where she has over 125 varieties of exotic palms, as well as several tropical fruit trees (including a cacao tree with mature fruits) and various heliconias. Among the most eye-catching one was a very delicate, diminutive green and pink *H. hirsuta* 'Pink Chumaniana'.

Reily Rodríguez, our current Treasurer, gave a report of our finances. According to the January, 2009 bank statement we have \$2,280.00 in the account. At today's meeting, close to \$400 was generated from the Raffle and Membership dues.

Dr. Armando Rodríguez, our invited guest for the educational conference titled "Murcielagos y la Flora", unfortunately could not make it to the meeting. Therefore, we regret that HSPR had no conference.

For the Show & Tell brainstorming session I brought an "unnamed" hairy pendant heliconia. Dr. Raymond Jerome thought it could be *H. fernandezii* 'Peach Fuzz'. But, I tend to believe otherwise, since it is a very hairy inflorescence and the yellow is much lighter in color than *H. fernandezii*. I believe it could be a "seedling variation" of *H. ramonensis* var. *lanuginosa*. I also brought a *H. chartacea* 'Columbine', which is very similar to *H. chartacea* 'Sexy Pink', but instead of pink, is red in color. I also had three other inflorescences, which were in bloom at the time at my farm, which share similar characteristics. These were: *H. wagneriana*, *H. wagneriana* 'Torbo', and *H. stricta* 'Costa Rica'. Ray also brought a specimen of *H. bihai* x *caribaea* 'Lemon Drop'. He explained to us how he's been able to develop, through "seedling variations", over 23 different cultivars in his private collection. He also told us that he is in the process of adding more than 200 new heliconia color photographs to HSPR official web site – making it the largest and most comprehensive one in the world!

Dr. Abreu proceeded to remind our members of the upcoming HSI Conference, to be held in July, in Singapore. So far, seven persons have confirmed an interest in the trip to South East Asia. These are: Dr José Abreu, Bryan Brunner, Duane Kolterman, Christopher and Melania Rivera, as well as me and my wife Annette.

Amaris Urbina and Jeff Granoff are two new invited guests who enthusiastically joined our group. Several of our members publicly communicated the different activities that they were organizing for the upcoming weeks.

A calendar for the rest of the year's meetings was established. Isabelita Colorado and Dr. Frank Wadsworth have graciously offered their country house, in Comerío, to host our June meeting. For the benefit of our West Coast members, the September meeting will be held at the University of Puerto Rico's Mayaguez campus and the December meeting (our traditional Christmas Party with authentic "lechón asao a la varita" – roasted at the farm!) will be held at Gildreth and Bob Castro's Conservation Center at Cerro Guilarte, in Adjuntas. The corresponding three educational conferences are also being coordinated. They will be announced at a later date.

As always, The Raffle was one of the most anticipated events of the day. Different varieties of plants and inflorescences were raffled among



Yolanda Reyes in her "Jardín Botánico de Bolsillo".

**HELICONIA SOCIETY OF
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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.

From Our Last Meeting (continued)

After the meeting, Yoli gave us a personal tour of her plant nursery and hosted a delicious banquet for us. It consisted of arroz con pulpo, balalao guisado and sorullitos de maíz, among other delicious, culinary temptations. We are all indebted to her generosity for making this meeting another memorable occasion full of camaraderie.

Héctor Méndez Caratini
Vice President, HSPR



Heliconia hirsuta 'Pink Chumaniana'.

President's Corner

Greetings to Everyone:

I would like to thank all who attended our March meeting at Yolanda's garden-residence; to those who weren't able to be there, you missed a great meeting!

Our next meeting will be at the farm and country home of Isabelita Colorado and Dr. Frank Wadsworth; I hope all will attend to reciprocate their hospitality and effort.

I would like to encourage all who have heliconia collections to bring a couple of rhizomes for the raffle, which is the most productive source of our operating funds. It would be especially good if they have "rare names".

We have been contacted, via Duane Kolterman, Bob Castro and Bryan Brunner, by the organization Casa Pueblo of Adjuntas and its organizer Dr. Arturo Massol. They would like to obtain some rhizomes from our collections. I understand this to be an excellent organization and have asked Bob Castro to invite Dr. Massol to our next meeting to make a presentation to our members.

See you in Isabelita's garden!

José R. Abreu,
President, HSPR