

# BROMELIANA

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## THE 2012 WORLD BROMELIAD CONFERENCE IN ORLANDO

by Herb Plever

“Kaleidoscope of Bromeliads”, the 20<sup>th</sup> World Bromeliad Conference was held at the Caribe Royale Hotel from September 24<sup>th</sup> to October 1<sup>st</sup> in Orlando, FL. It was the third time the world conference was held there; this time the official host was the Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies, but the local Bromeliad Society of Central Florida did most of the hard work in putting on a conference and did it well (except for the too large venue of the auction and the frigid conditions at the banquet). The conference was attended by about 300 people, mostly from the United States, but many registrants were from abroad.

Although this WBC was held in late September, it was sunny, hot (88° F.) and humid outside, but we spent most of time in the hotel as there was much to do and see. The hotel facilities were spread out and there was a long, welcome walk outside to go from the rooms to the conference site. The Caribe Royale is a lovely facility offering suite rooms with separate bedroom, living room, toilet, shower and sink areas that were a bargain at \$119 a day in today's market. A restaurant and café were available with decent food and prices.

The crowded events schedule over the week was enough to keep one fully occupied, besides the fun of meeting up with old friends - and making new ones.



Don Beadle and Joann in Orlando

Peter Bak who runs the giant Bak nursery in Amsterdam gently chided me for my article lamenting the disappearance of *Vriesea splendens*. He said there were many growers selling *V. splendens* in Europe.

One great surprise gave me special joy when I was able to greet and hug Don Beadle, a good friend who has quietly returned to working with bromeliads in Michael Kiehl's nursery in Venice, FL. Don had owned that facility and sold it to Michael for personal reasons. Don left the fold to live with his true love on a river boat; those of us who

knew him wished him well. When the suppressed brom bug emerged, Joann made it possible for him to be both personally and billbergia happy.

I beg the reader's indulgence if I have digressed and now wax eloquent about Don, who has played an important role in BSI and WBC history. Beadle, a/k/a Mr. Billbergia, created hundreds of beautiful Billbergia hybrid cultivars, taught us about their cultural needs and at many a World Conference he presented a professional musical video on the billbergias that was educational, entertaining, and memorable.

Don Beadle was the BSI's first cultivar registrar, and after years of research he created the first Bromeliad Cultivar Registry in 1998. This monumental work is still invaluable and unique for its comprehensive historical

**NEXT MEETING** - Tuesday, November 13th, 2012 promptly at 7:00 P.M. at the [Ripley-Grier Studios 520 8th Ave. \(between 36th & 37th St\) Room 16K - 16<sup>th</sup> floor](#)

**THE WORLD BROMELIAD CONFERENCE IN ORLANDO** - complete video coverage of the show plants, garden tours and bromeliad personalities. Please bring in plant(s) for sale and for Show and Tell. As promised, there will be some pups of *Aechmea* 'Blue Tango'.

source data on all cultivars; I consult it frequently even though we now have available digital cultivar registries on BSI's website at [www.registry.bsi.org](http://www.registry.bsi.org) (thanks to Derek Butcher, Geoff Lawn and Eric Gouda) and at [www.fsbs.org](http://www.fsbs.org) (thanks to Derek Butcher and Michael Andreas).

On Wednesday I took the tours of three local yard/gardens of Steve Beaudoin/Tina Farsetta, Steven Wagner and Lisa Robinette. The first two featured lovely foliage plants and a few bromeliads; Lisa's "yard" was loaded with broms. There was a nice welcoming party on Wednesday morning where we were greeted by BSI President Jay Thurott. I did not take the Saturday tours of Leu Gardens and the Environmental Study Center in Osceola County which featured broms in their native Florida habitat. I went home on Sunday so I could not take the Monday commercial nursery tours to Grant Groves' Color Zone Tropicals, Russell's Bromeliads, Deroose Plants and McCrory's Sunny Hill Nursery.

On Thursday afternoon both the plant sales room and the judged show opened at the same time. As expected, hundreds of people rushed into the sales area while only a few went to the judged show. Vendors, including Bullis Bromeliads, Color Zone Tropicals (Grant Groves), Michael Kiehl, McCrory's Sunny Hill Nursery, Tropiflora and Duroflor (Chester Skotak) brought in many hundreds of plants, and those were mostly sold before the week had ended. There were some beautiful plants to be bought from every vendor. I had made my usual vow not to bring home any more plants, and this time I mostly kept to it except for about a dozen *Tillandsias*.

Unlike the WBC two years ago, there were some really beautiful commercial displays. Tropiflora had a nice exhibit in the upper lobby of the hotel, Patricia Bullis and Florida East Coast



Front view of Grant Groves' Kaleidoscope display

Bromeliad Society had a display in the corridor at the approach to the Show, Living Colors Bromeliads had a striking display inside the Show area and Grant Groves for his Color Zone Tropicals nursery mounted a really superlative exhibit outside the entrance to the Show.

Grant Groves' elegant, kaleidoscopic design consisted of four large triangular areas with a

dark background surrounding a huge flowering tillandsia that looked like *Tillandsia kerukoffiana*. (It was so robust it could be *var. piepenbringii*, but its leaves were dark and somewhat lepidote - not glabrous green as in the photos and descriptions. So perhaps it is a different species.) Six large, blooming *Neoregelias* were mounted into each triangle in sets of red, fuchsia, purple and pink, and the triangle borders consisted of many small flowering neos with pink and rose blooms.

Every plant was uniformly the same size and shape and of a high quality. And at the base corner of each triangle was a clump of Herb Hill's new, polyploid hybrid of Beadle's *Billbergia* 'Poquito Mas' with dramatic black and fire-red markings. (See my note about this plant at end of this article.)

There were some beautiful show plants, but more were of average quality, or were immature and only a few were in bloom. There were about 300 entries; *Neoregelias*, *Dyckias* and tank type *Vrieseas* were the genera with the most entries, but there were a reasonable number of *Cryptanthus* and *Orthophytums*. There were only a handful of *Guzmanias* and *Tillandsias*. Floridians don't seem to grow (or like?) these genera. The most interesting and most challenging *Tillandsias* entries to grow in a pot were *T. rackii*, *T. reuteri* and *T.*

*biflora* all entered by Jerry Rack. This show was an improvement over the WBC in 2010. (I still can't get out of my mind the incredible, huge displays of quality, broms in bloom by local Australian societies at the WBC in



*Tillandsia reuteri*



*T. rackii*



Cairns in 2008 - and they had to drive many hundreds or even a thousand miles to bring their plants to the conference.

There were 26 (!) plants on the prize table; some were nice and some appeared to be only of average quality. The five awarded *Cryptanthus* showed the current penchant among crypt growers to grow multiple plants in one pot. This seems to me to defeat the aesthetic “Earth Star” character of the genus, even when as in this case the individual pieces are of fine quality. Thus we saw an award for the best crypt multiple (?) to *Cr.* ‘Jennifer’, the awarded *Cr.* ‘Elaine’ had two pieces in the pot, two very nice pieces in a pot of *Cr.* ‘Thriller’ were awarded Best New Crypt Hybrid when a single plant in a pot would have been a knockout, and the prized 4 or 5 pieces of *Cr. fosterianus* in one pot totally ruined its beautiful earth star character. (Compare this multiple with my single specimen in the photos on this page.) And the single *Cr.* ‘Eternal Love’ (unregistered), awarded Best Cryptanthus, with too few leaves was no great shakes.

The Best In Show Award and the Mulford Foster Award were given to a *Vriesea* hybrid (*V. hieroglyphica* x *fosteriana* ‘Red Chestnut’) x (*V.* ‘Nova’ x *V. fosteriana* ‘Rubra’). It is really a beautiful plant. BUT, the awards raise problems. BSI show rules exclude commercial growers from receiving these awards, and the plant was entered by David Fell who is a commercial grower. Also, the plant is unregistered with a formula but no name, and I think it is high time that show rules require that plants be registered to be eligible for prizes. (See my note at the end of this article.) And, David Fell is not listed as BSI member.

Another gorgeous *Vriesea* was *V.* ‘Donna’ made and entered by Michael Kiehl. This is a new cultivar of Herb Hill’s *V.* ‘Purple Haze’; it is still not listed in Michael’s catalog, but I urge him to register it. Other show plants I liked were: *Vriesea* ‘Mirage’ (Arden), *Neoregelia* ‘Seduction’ (unregistered), *Neoregelia* ‘Inferno’, *Neoregelia* Governor’s Plea F2 x N. ‘Tunisia’ by Paul Wingert (it was starting to bloom and Paul will register the plant when the flowers



Multiple *Cryptanthus fosterianus*



My *Cryptanthus fosterianus*

‘Steve’, a blooming, mounted hybrid of *T. cacticola* x *T. fasciculata* entered by Steve Goode.

Nine interesting video seminars were presented on Friday and Saturday: Dr. Terri Bert spoke on “**Bromeliad Ecology - Bromeliad Diversity in an Ecological Wonderland**”, Dr. Larry Giroux talked on “**The Diversity of Cryptanthus**”, Andy Siekkinin showed photos “**In Search of Mexican Silver - Hechtia Argentea**”, Eloise Beach spoke on “**Creating and Growing Chester Skotak’s Hybrids**” with photos of Chester’s millions of plants growing in his huge mountain spread in Costa Rica, Bruce Holst of Selby Gardens took us to Venezuela and onto the strange mountain plateau of “**Roraima tepui - The Original Lost World**”, Barry Landau gave his ideas on how to expand the reach of BSI by “**Social Media and Bromeliads**”, Dennis Cathcart of Tropiflora related some of his explorations of “**Bromeliads In Habitat**”, Peter Bak of the Bak Nursery in Holland showed us “**The Art of Growing & Producing Millions of Seedlings**”, and finally, the incomparable story-teller Don Beadle (virtually a last replacement for the ailing Harry Luther) told us his personal story with his old charm and self-effacing wit in “**Billbergia’s Last Hurrah**”.



(*Vriesea hieroglyphica* x *fosteriana* ‘Red Chestnut’) x (*V.* ‘Nova’ x *fosteriana* ‘Rubra’) – Best In Show

The fund-raising rare plant auction was the usual fun, but the intimacy got lost in the huge auditorium. The food at the big Saturday banquet was good, but we were frozen out by the frigid temperature. After awhile I went back to my room to get a jacket, and when I returned I found I had missed receiving an award along with Nat DeLeon for 50 years of service to BSI. I appreciate the award and thank BSI for its consideration. Congratulations go to our good friend Derek Butcher who received the prestigious 2012 Wally Berg Award. Sylvia and I had a grand time and look forward to the WBC in Hawaii in 2014.

open), *Neoregelia* ‘Wild Rabbit’ (Skotak), a variegated form of *Neoregelia* ‘Fairchild’ (that I hope Patricia Bullis will name and register as a new cultivar as well as her *Neoregelia* ‘Seduction’), *Dyckia* ‘South Bay’, *Tillandsia rothii*, *T. magnispica*, and *T.*

**NOTE - polyploid hybrid Billbergia 'Poquito Mas'** - Most bromeliad species and hybrids are diploid - that is they have two sets of chromosomes, one from each parent. But most hybrids are sterile and cannot reproduce from seed. Polyploid plants have more than two sets of chromosomes and in many diploid plant families polyploidy can be chemically induced (usually with colchicine). This can render some hybrids fertile and susceptible to induced genetic changes to achieve character changes in their progeny. This procedure is often effective with orchids, but rarely so in hybridizing bromeliads.



hybrid of *B. 'Poquito Mas'*

A few years ago Herb Hill made an improved clone of *Billbergia* 'Poquito Mas' that was introduced at the 2010 World Bromeliad Conference by Grant Hill. It was larger than Beadle's original cross and had more pronounced markings. Recently, Herb was successful in inducing polyploidy into that clone of *B. 'Poquito Mas'*, and he was able to insert specific genes into its chromosomes that genetically and dramatically changed its brown markings to black, white blotches to fire-red and increased its size. The result is the new hybrid of *B. 'Poquito Mas'* that you see in the photo above. It was used in Grant Groves beautiful display at the WBC.

**NOTE 2 - Registering Cultivars.** At shows and in newsletter photos in recent years we've seen a proliferation of unregistered hybrids made by both commercial and amateur hybridizers. In any cross between two plants the resulting seed progeny will display a wide range of different plants. In that grex there will be many more "dogs" than quality plants with clearly different characters. Some hybridizers have been known to release a slew of new cultivars from one cross with different names, but not very different appearances (especially in *Cryptanthus* and *Neoregelia*).

All this undercuts the BCR and the BSI Registrar, and it is a sign of disrespect for BSI that impedes unity and lowers morale and membership. In the WBC show in Orlando there were a lot of unregistered broms, including some of the prize winners. BSI has an official Bromeliad Cultivar Registry ([www.registry.bsi.org](http://www.registry.bsi.org)) and a knowledgeable Registrar to process registration applications so that photos and information about legitimate cultivars are available on line to all bromeliad growers. Hybridizers have an ethical responsibility to the bromeliad market (and to the integrity of our plant family) to name and register cultivars that have clear differences from other progeny. Growers who enter plants in shows also have a responsibility to enter registered hybrids. I think it is high time that leaders of

BSI, clubs and newsletter editors start pushing hybridizers to register their products. I am in favor of changing show rules to deny prizes to unregistered plants. No doubt this might reduce the number of show entries, but we have to start somewhere to clear up the mess.

**IN MEMORIAM - HARRY LUTHER**

I have just received the terrible, tragic news that Harry Luther died on the morning of October 17<sup>th</sup> at Changi General Hospital in Singapore, following a massive brain

hemorrhage. Having already completed this issue when I got the sorrowful news, I cut material to make room for this too brief notice. Harry's passing is a grave loss to the bromeliad world. Simply put, with his vast knowledge, encyclopedic memory and 24-7 devotion to bromeliads, Harry Luther was internationally recognized as the primary go-to expert on bromeliad identification. He was reliable and always responded to requests. Harry was appointed Director of the Bromeliad Identification Center at Marie Selby Gardens in Sarasota, Florida in 1978 and in 1980 he became Curator of Living Collections. He remained at Selby for 31 years until his resignation and acceptance of the position of Assistant Director for Horticulture at Singapore's new Gardens By The Bay. During that long tenure at Selby Harry was responsible for creating the largest living collection of bromeliads in the world, and the BIC maintains taxonomic files for more than 3,000 species and more than 2,000 photographic slides of living material.

Harry's accomplishments have been remarkable. He described more than 100 new species of bromeliads, produced the authoritative biannual *Alphabetical List of Bromeliad Binomials*, gave countless educational talks and wrote numerous pamphlets and articles for the BSI Journal, Selbyana and elsewhere.

HP

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