

S.A. BROMELIAD GAZETTE

Vol 34

Number 5

September / October 2010

PUBLISHED BY:

The Bromeliad Society of South Australia Inc

Born 1977 and still offsetting!



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Meetings Venue:

Maltese Cultural Centre,
6 Jeanes Street,
Beverley

Time: 2.00pm.

Second Sunday of each month
Exceptions – 1st Sunday in May, &
August & no meeting in December or
unless advised otherwise

**VISITORS & NEW MEMBERS
WELCOME**



Pitcairnia burle-marxii

Pots, Labels & Hangers - Small quantities available all meetings.

For special orders/ larger quantities call Ron Masters on 83514876

Dates for 2010

Meeting dates:- Sept 12th **Pitcairnioideae**, Oct 10th **Neoregelias** (no restrictions but plants that are showing a bit of colour,) Nov 14th **Plant swap and Auction** starting 30 minutes early. Special afternoon tea - bring a plate

Special Events:- Bromeliad Extravaganza. Nov 13 featuring Displays & Sales

Applications for membership always welcome.

Subscriptions \$10.00 per year Feb to Feb.

Several reference photos courtesy of "fcbs.org"



July Meeting from the Secretary's desk

15 minutes before kick-off, I was worried about the lack of attendance. It was a cold day and the start of winter chills especially for oldies. Even our Tea Lady had succumbed but the reserve stood up well. Anyway, the rush started and we were soon up to the average attendance of circa 40. Peter eventually got the heaters working. Raffle prize donations were down but sufficient to keep members satisfied. Adam spoke on the few plants brought in for display but this was a blessing in disguise because it left more time for Len's presentation on Ecuador.

Advantages and disadvantages of feeding bromeliads extra nutrients was the flavour of the month. Everybody should know by now that my philosophy is why feed when in the wild all the epiphytic plant gets is blown in by the wind, rotting vegetation nearby, or the odd bird flying overhead. Others feed heavily (a favourite in the USA) where the plant takes what it needs and 95% finds its way into the environment giving such things as blue/green algae. The ideal is somewhere in between and whether GoGo juice from Neutrog is the way to go has yet to be decided. Anything is worth a try and our pots and labels man – Ron – is investigating. After his metal knee is in working order he will no doubt be kicking butt!

My view is that if you are a bromeliad person you must be patient and you get more thrills by waiting to get your reward than buying a plant already in flower! As Bill pointed out, it would be good to get me to grow my plants bigger because I would have less space and therefore the greater chance of acquiring plants that fell off benches or wires. Adam is the more impatient sort who prefers to give plants the hurry up and as well he is experimenting in making them flower earlier using Ethrel that is known to pineapple growers by the gallon. Such is the potency you have to work with an eyedropper. Anyway, Adam is presenting a paper on this at the Darwin Conference and after he has tried it out on them in April 2011 we will try to twist his arm to give us a presentation too.

I just had to get Julie Batty to take one photo to show you just one part of his current experiments. A favourite with nurserymen is the recent Skotak variegated bigeneric *xAnanea* 'Raspberry Ice'. It struggles in Adelaide but loves Brisbane conditions. It is said to be a hybrid between *Aechmea serrata* (probably *A. smithiorum* but that is another story!) and *Ananas comosus*. It is a favourite with nurseryman because it is variegated AND its inflorescence takes on the *Ananas* habit of offsetting profusely as the photo by Julie Batty shows.



xAnanea 'Raspberry Ice' photo by J Batty

There were several plants on the Tillandsia stand.

For those interested in black flowers there was *T. tenebra* and *T. cotagaitensis*. Not only are the plants miniature but so too are the flowers



T. tenebra



T. cotagaitensis.

Then there was the much larger *T. mexicana* in spike. This had been imported in 1996 as an adult plant and shows you do need patience. Mind you, the name is in doubt (what is different?!) and it will soon be butchered and referred to the Mexican taxonomists. Len was disappointed that his collected *T. floribunda* from Ecuador is much smaller though brighter coloured than the 'normal' species. *Racinaea*, Len's latest interest, possibly because of his current adventures in Ecuador have species names very difficult to identify. He felt that the plant he brought in was *R. schumanniana* and he could well be correct. It is in the *R. adpressa* group that has many taxonomists tearing out their hair!

July Meeting cont:

OUT OF VICTORIA. This was prompted by the Out of Africa where it appears 'human beans' evolved from. Anyway I refer to a small form of *T. punctulata* which Len assures us grows more easily in Adelaide than its bigger mate. Instead of being called *T. punctulata* 'Small' which of course does not help in sales it has been called 'Tanya Maree' which is a name cropping up all over Australia. I encourage the use of cultivar names if a plant is different to the norm but I feel it should be put into the Bromeliad Cultivar Register with details as to why it is different. The optimist in me suggests this will happen. If you have your 'species' hat on you would know that even Eduard Morren confused it with *T. tricolor* as the enclosed painting done in 1879 shows. Mind you, prior to 1977 we had a small *T. melanopus* sensu Mez and a larger *T. punctulata* only for Lyman Smith to decide there were synonymous. So here we have the taxonomists wanting to join two species and nurserymen wanting to split them!

We finished with Len's presentation on his recent 16-day trip to Ecuador in June that I will just glance over because Len will be presenting this at other places around Australia and we would not wish to spoil their fun. Suffice it to say, Motels in Ecuador at \$5 a bed are not recommended. One thing we did learn is that having battery back up for a computer can be a problem because you may think you are connected to the mains power source when you aren't!

The purpose of this venture was to cover much more of the country than in his shorter trip last year, to photograph bromeliads in their natural habitat, and to acquire some plants to bring home in two boxes inside his suitcase. Len was accompanied by the same ex-German, now living in Ecuador, with whom he travelled previously.

He began the presentation by explaining how many Ecuadorian species had been added to the official Australian Government's list of plants permitted entry into the country (ICON) since his last trip. That meant a wider range of plants would be eligible to be brought back. One box was to have plants that had to be gassed using the noxious methyl bromide, whereas the other box contained plants that could be dipped in a mixture of poisons and oil, because they were known to be susceptible to that gas. Upon arrival back in Sydney after traveling from Guayaquil (Ecuador) to Santiago (Chile), Len was devastated to discover that his suitcase full of plants was sitting in a building in Buenos Aires (Argentina). It had been placed on the wrong LAN Chile aircraft in Santiago. After many heated discussions at the Sydney International Airport with the airlines, Australian Customs and AQIS, a method to get the suitcase to Adelaide three and a half days later was negotiated. However, that extra-unscheduled delay caused noticeable deterioration to the cramped plants even before their respective treatments, and prior to entering quarantine for three months. Len awaits the final outcome with anxiety.

For those with an atlas, the planned itinerary was from Ecuador's largest city, the Pacific port of Guayaquil, to Latacunga, bypassing the capital Quito, then Papallacta, Baeza, Puyo (including a day return trip towards Baños where the Tungurahua volcano was erupting), Macas, Zamora, Loja, Vilcabamba (including a day trip south towards the Peruvian border), Zaruma, Pasaje and back to Guayaquil. This is a large circle, covering a lot of the country, including the high Andes Mountains and their eastern slopes halfway down towards the Amazon rainforest. The highest pass was over 4,000 metres altitude. The biggest obstacles were numerous landslides and heavy rain. Some landslides forced the route to be abandoned, while others merely meant hours waiting for a pathway to be graded.

Before starting the story of the recent trip, Len used some highlights of the 2009 trip to give an overview of the types of terrain covered, and the types of species to be found.

On the first day, rather than taking sealed roads in their hired Ford Explorer, the plan was to travel along a rough unsealed road to Latacunga because the latter stages of that itinerary included an area rich in bromeliads. However, their first landslide ended that plan after a few hours along that road. But, before then, *Guzmania monostachia* and *Werauhia sanguinolenta* were prevalent. There was no choice but to return and take another route, meaning that they did not go near Latacunga, thereby extending the day's driving considerably. As evening approached, they needed to find accommodation. A "Motel" sign had them driving down a lane, along another lane full of pot-holes, looking for the motel. The rate was only US\$5 per person, cheap even by Ecuadorian standards. However, after discovering the motel was really a brothel and the \$5 was for an hour, it was thought better to continue looking for better accommodation further along.

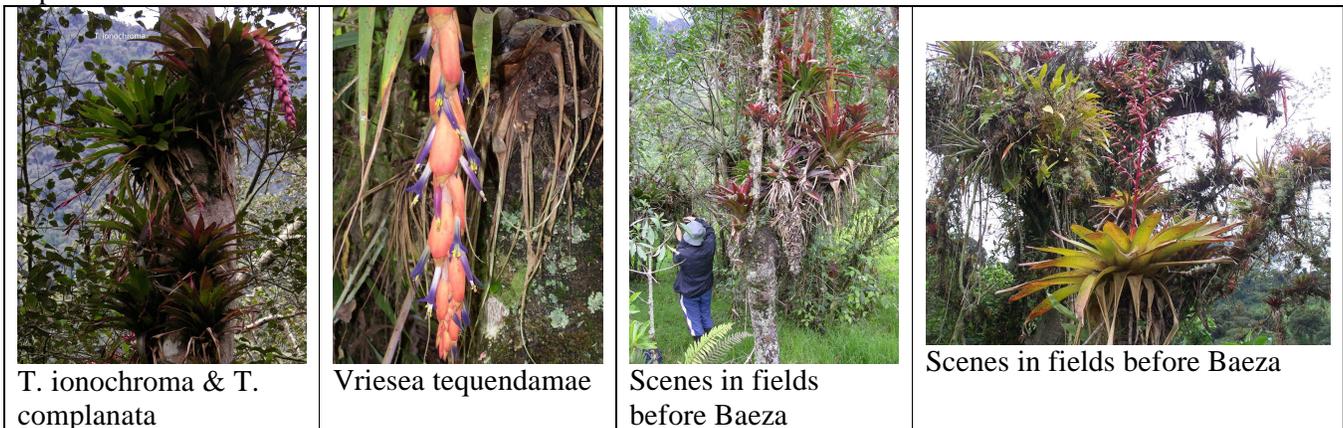
July Meeting cont: -Len's presentation

They did not want to enter Quito, and so pushed on to Papallacta high up in the Andes Mountains where various levels of accommodation existed amongst hot springs warmed by a nearby volcano.

The bonus coming from this exhausting first day meant that extra time was available on the second day through heavenly fields of bromeliads.

It appears as though *Guzmania monostachia* and *Tillandsia complanata* are the two most prevalent bromeliad species in Ecuador. They were seen in huge numbers on most of the days of the trip. In this general area, and in fact for most of the trip, the only bromeliads encountered were tillandsias, guzmanias, racinaeas, werauhias, mezobromelias and the so-called grey vrieseas, all from the Tillandsioideae sub-family. The only exceptions were some aechmeas later on the eastern mountain slopes. Of course, orchids and ferns were everywhere. Not being an expert on Ecuadorian bromeliads, especially guzmanias, Len is still unsure of the identity of many of the plants photographed in habitat. However, during the first trek away from the road between Papallacta and Baeza, the species found included an unknown grey vriesea, the spectacular *Tillandsia ionochroma*, more *T. complanata*, *Racinaea tetrantha* and *R. nervibracteata*. Further stops proved rewarding, although it was quite scary when Len found himself thigh deep in mud and water and unable to extricate himself for nearly half an hour. Moral: when you are old and overweight, don't venture into water-filled areas with unknown structure underfoot.

The last venture before reaching Baeza, on this the second day of the whole trip, proved to be the most memorable. After getting through the ever-present barbed wire, and still wearing slush-filled boots and trousers, Len found himself in a wet, grassy field with numerous trees adorned with the most spectacular array of bromeliads that he had ever encountered anywhere. There were several different unidentified guzmanias and racinaeas, *T. complanata*, *T. maculata* and *Vriesea tequendamae* (which Len craved). But, of special interest were plants that were clearly natural hybrids with *T. complanata* as one parent. Then, on a single tree, they found a most mysterious group of plants, apparently grey vrieseas. However, Len did not recognize such a species, opening up the possibility that it might be a natural hybrid with *V. tequendamae* as a parent.



Baeza does not have even moderate accommodation, and so they took basic rooms in the town's swimming pool complex after midday. Len spent the next hour under a hot shower trying to get rid of as much slush and smell as possible from his trousers, socks and boots. However, the socks had to be discarded, being beyond redemption. Thereafter, they spent the rest of the afternoon on a road heading north-east, seeing large mezobromelias, *T. maculata*, another similar tillandsia with a taller, brighter red branched inflorescence, more racinaeas and guzmanias, and the plant being sought, a large red-leaved form of *T. fendleri*. A magnificent big specimen found its way into the vehicle, only to be fried to a crisp by the methyl bromide gas when eventually treated in Adelaide. What a tragedy!

The next day from Baeza to Puyo was uneventful, with almost non-stop rain. Nevertheless, photographs were managed of the orange-bracted *T. confinis*, *Guzmania mosquerae* and *Racinaea spiculosa*.

However, the following day was the second most productive of the trip as they drove to Baños and back, bypassing the erupting Tungurahua volcano.

July Meeting cont: -Len's presentation

Of special interest were a number of different tillandsias with erect, red, compound inflorescences including *T. towarensis* and *T. buseri*, as well as *V. aff. tequendamae*, *V. incurva*, a large form of *Racinaea tetrantha*, a different smaller form of *T. fendleri* and the extremely rare *T. barbeyana*. The two different forms of the beautiful *Tillandsia biflora*, one heavily spotted, the other with thin longitudinal red lines on the leaves, were also abundant.

Driving to and around Macas did not produce much of interest, mainly due to constant rain and deplorable side-roads. Landslides caused long delays. The joke that the potholes full of water were deep enough for ducks to swim in proved to be factual. Two ducklings were in a pothole! However, *T. aff. buseri*, *Racinaea fraseri* and another very attractive spotted racinaea should be mentioned. A few aechmea species were seen, including *Aechmea retusa*. The accommodation at Macas in a Casa (B&B), owned by a young Texan woman and her Ecuadorian husband, was by far the best on this trip. As an added bonus, she would prove unbeatable on TV's Masterchef.

The long drive from Macas to Zamora, where Len's companion now lives, provided little of plant interest. The roads were deplorable, landslides and a bridge under repair created delays, and rain was frequent. However, the two days spent in Zamora enabled the plants to be cleaned, immersed in a strong insecticidal solution, and washed again. Also, Len obtained some nice rare species from the private collection. After this interlude, some locations near Loja, visited last year, were revisited, looking successfully for racinaeas recently added to ICON.

Unfortunately, at this point in Len's presentation, near the end, the computer failed to respond. It was eventually discovered that the connection to the computer from the hall's power supply had become loose, and the computer had been using the internal battery instead. Of course, this battery now needed recharging. Most members then left, but those inquisitive enough stayed while the problem was rectified. A few of the later highlights were shown. Anyway, the following is a description of the remainder of the trip.

They then headed south to Vilcabamba for two nights, enabling a full day to explore regions further south towards the Peruvian border. Apart from some superior forms of *Vriesea cylindrica*, the highlight was photographing a large plant high up in a tree that is undoubtedly a natural hybrid between *Tillandsia fendleri* and *T. complanata*. What one would give for a chain-saw!



The last part of the trip involved a long drive to Zaruma. This had been scheduled for last year's itinerary, but had to be cancelled due to a religious procession closing the only road in that direction. Unfortunately, this year, the rough road caused their only tyre puncture, and the flimsy gear provided by the car rental company could not possibly loosen the wheel nuts. But, thankfully, a sympathetic and kind driver came along later, and used his equipment to help replace the wheel.

They found a great B&B in Zaruma in which to stay for two nights, with beautiful landscaped gardens and a small private zoo. This enabled ventures in different radiating directions, including a visit to a small plant nursery. The highlights included *Tillandsia confertiflora*, *T. venusta*, *Racinaea pseudotetrantha*, and an unknown large spotted racinaea. The onwards route through Paccha to Pasaje produced some of the richest flora of the trip, but little new as far as bromeliads were concerned. However, a slow crawl on a side-road over mist enshrouded mountains towards Chilla produced the largest and best form of *Tillandsia confinis* var. *minor*. The final full day included a drive to Pucara along the side of a stream. However, Len decided against adding to his plants, despite temptations, because there would be insufficient time to clean them thoroughly and dry out before packing in the two boxes when back in Guayaquil. Len did not foresee that his suitcase would subsequently visit more of South America than he did.



August Meeting from the Secretary's desk

Another good roll-up despite the cold and this month there were loads of plants on the various raffle tables. We are worse than Bingo players. Three separate raffles – A door prize that costs nothing other than the cost of getting to the meeting, a raffle at 10c a ticket and the special 50c raffle for really special plants!

Mind you, there are challenges ahead for those who want to have the correct name on the label. But then I see these as challenges for the future as members strive to learn even more about Bromeliads. To think I have had one success in getting a newer member to check for prickles on the floral bracts of *Aechmea recurvata* to find out which variety it is.

I am sure you would like hear this anecdote where one of our members, Pat Goldfinch, was on holiday in Northern NSW and went on one of those 'day trips by bus to see the country'. Well, the bus happened to call into PineGrove Nursery and she enjoyed her afternoon tea so much she did not realise that there was a couple of acres of Broms out the back! BUT she did have time to take a photo of Ross outside his Tillandsia dome – an ex bird aviary with shade cloth over it! A year ago I had complained to Ross about his lack of interest in the welfare of his Tillandsias! And here was his response! Not only did said member take a photo but she also brought back a couple of miniature Neo hybrids for Margaret. So both Butchers were happy! There was also a good roll-up of plants for the Winter Brag to keep Adam busy. Mind you the first plant was not a brag for the grower but a brag for Adam with his masseur fingers (Didn't you know this is just one of his talents). Anyway, there was this sorry looking offset of Neo. *macwilliamsii* whose leaves were joined at the top. An example of what we call quilling. Plants need a range of sugars to survive just like humans but sometimes they get like treacle and gum things up. Dry weather does not help but some plants especially hybrids are more prone to this problem than others. Just as we use soapy water to get rid of sticky fingers this can be used to help the cause in releasing bound leaves. Adam had no soap so had to rely on gentle finger massage and you could hear the sigh of relief from the plant after treatment as its leaves went to more normal positions.

An *xAnamea* 'Scorpio' was present with its pineapple topknot, so it is a bit of a brag for this time of year especially as it said to be growing 'outside' under 70% shade cloth. The plant had strived so much to retain its topknot but its grower wanted to remove it to plant it elsewhere. WHOA. Wait at least we get into warm weather was the advice. Even then growing this on is much more of a challenge that taking the normal offsets from the base.



xAnamea 'Scorpio'

Next was *Aechmea recurvata* var *benrathii* which you could see Adam pondering over because it was not the 'norm' but was correct to all things scientific if you follow Lyman Smith. It had prickles on the floral bracts and poking a dainty finger would have revealed this phenomenon!

It was good to see a *Cryptanthus* 'It' and *C.fosteriana* looking so healthy. In the old days of Eric Tonkin who was good at cutting and joining glass, we had lots of large terrariums around. These days, glass seems to be hard to find. But like all good Bromeliad growers you must have lateral thinking. Julie Batty (or was it David?) decided that those large translucent storage crates were just right and her decision was correct.

Vriesea ensiformis in spike showed how tough vrieseas can be. This species has been around Australia for over 40 years and like many vrieseas has a habit of losing its label. The keen ones, on acquiring such a plant have to wait for flowering if they have any hope in identifying it. While there have been many hybrids made with this species in the past, unintentional backcrossing has also produced look-a-like *V. ensiformis*. Luckily there are clear differences in the flower spike for identification purposes.

A *Pitcairnia burle-marxii* was showing defiance in wanting to succeed in growing in Adelaide, hanging on to its dried leaves as well as giving reddish tints to its green ones. As Adam said this added to its appeal. My view is that in the warm wild its leaves are deciduous (in other words they fall off) and this means I get itchy fingers that get slapped by she-who-must-be-obeyed



Pitcairnia burle-marxii

August Meeting cont:

Vr. 'Purple Pleasure' was showing its purple leaves and squiggly (Glyph) markings. This is a John Arden hybrid from California who has been trying over the years to combine the leaf markings with a decent flower head. Australian and Kiwi hybridists have ignored the flower situation. With John Arden we still get long scapes to the flowers whereas I feel that if you are going to play with nature you should be trying for a plant with impressive leaves AND a short bright flower head. But then I have never been a hybridist.



Next was a palm tree garden setting with *Aechmea recurvata* var *benrathii*. Who did the finger test to see that the floral bracts only had a prickle at the extreme top?

This garden needed maintenance, which brings us to George's 'garden' potted arrangement that was up to George's usual artistic standard. Mind you, this will also need gardening in the future but he knows about that!

Neoregelia eleutheropetala x *pendula* is a hybrid done by Skotak but was not considered worthy of giving it a cultivar name and registering it. So, little is known about this hybrid other than to say it still got into nurseries for sale. Is it unstable? Peter Hall is to be praised for getting his plant to survive through winter so far. Perhaps it is hybrid vigour. Any way, the offsets are huge compared to the old 'mother'. This hybrid is like crossing an Alsatian with a Chihuahua because *N. eleutheropetala* can grow to 2m in diameter. I'll be interested to see how big the offsets will get before flowering.

It was good to see an *Aechmea weilbachii* var *weilbachii* in flower. To think there are 5 different forms of this species and you rarely see the other 4.



Aechmea weilbachii var *weilbachii*

Photo by J. Batty

Then there was *Billbergia* 'Perriam's Pride' a variegate which emerged in Adelaide in the 1980's and is considered superior to 'Louise' that cropped up in the US. It has typical *B. distachia* flowers. *B. 'Robert Saunders'* has also been around over 30 years having been created by Bill Morris from *B. saundersii* and 'Bobtail'.

Now to a brag and naming competition where we had a pot of *Neoregelia* that looked linked closely to the species *ampullacea* rather than a hybrid. There are 20 listed Cultivar forms of the species and about 50 hybrids so if you do not have a label the best bet is to say *N. ampullacea* hybrid. Flowers are not much help in this area but will be for the two Tillandsias brought in. One could well be correct at *T. polystachia*, a very variable species that has a very wide habitat both in North and South America. It even had a typical Nev Ryan label attached to it. The other plant will have to wait for flowering.

Finally we reached the Tillandsia section that started up a discussion on keeping our plants cooler in Summer. The smaller the area you have the easier it is to do but first a slight change in direction.

We do have several members who also grow Orchids and this number seems to be growing. I had thought this was because I thought they wanted a plant with a more casual lifestyle. I painted all Orchid growers as those who really cared for their plants and had set routines for watering, fertilizing etc. They had alarm clocks set so that at say 5am they would start a new regime followed by another time slot, followed by another time slot until the 12 months were completed, and they could start again. In fact their plants were very regimented and had to respond to the stimuli given. I had growers all tarred with the same brush but how wrong could I be. I found out that they had differences of opinion just like Brom growers where the criteria is more lateral thinking with some people willing to spend more money than others in creating a Shangri-La of living conditions.

August Meeting cont:

If anyone listens to Margaret they will know that I am not a gardener preferring to play at plant identity. A new plant gets the best of attention but after flowering and identity checks made, it goes back with the mob!

Back to the plants

I was impressed with Adam's *T. jalisco-monticola* but not much on the *T. flabellata* but I did ponder over it. How many of you thought that if you added leaves to the middle of this plant how much it looked like the *T. complanata* that Len proudly took in Ecuador to show us at the last meeting? (See page 4) This in turn reminds me about the Hunter District Newsletter that had a photo of a *T. complanata* hybrid on the front that looked awfully like one showed by Len. Could it be that all visitors to this part of Ecuador are directed to this tree OR is it the only tree!?



T. jalisco-monticola



T. flabellata

A couple of naming queries we solved with the advice to wait for flowering and then check the Cultivar Register for suggested parentages. The advantage with Tillandsia hybrids is that at the moment they are only species crossed species and you can sometimes guess one of the parents.

Bill was proud of his *T. velutina*, which was showing colour in the centre, which to the pessimist means it is on its way out or ready to flower to the optimist. We wait for developments. It is not easy to grow here but Gardenworld in Melbourne seem to have an endless supply. It is close to *T. brachycaulos*, in fact it was sold incorrectly for years as *T. brachycaulos* var *multiflora*.



T. velutina,



T. brachycaulos,

Last month I showed you *T. mexicana*, which took 15 years to flower and where offsets will be hard to find.

15 years must be a lucky number because this time I brought in *T. agascalientense* which we all know means it comes from the State of Aguascalientes in Mexico. We know it grows on rocks and forms large clumps. BUT it forms clumps before flowering and there were no offsets to be seen on my flowering plant. So I hope you all took that extra look because you may not see it anymore!



T. agascalientense

I leave you on that happy note.