

FLORIDA WEST COAST BROMELIAD SOCIETY

1954-2015

Celebrating over 60 Years in Bromeliads

floridabromeliads.org



December 2015 Newsletter

NEXT MEETING

Date & Time:

Tuesday, December 1, 2015
Doors open at 7 pm; meeting starts at 7:30

Location:

Good Samaritan Church
6085 Park Boulevard
Pinellas Park, Florida 33781

Holiday Party

Put on your holiday cheer. The next meeting will be dedicated entirely to our annual Holiday Party, with plant giveaways and lots of good food. There will be prize plants and pups for members (be sure to wear your nametag to be eligible for these), along with a Bromeliad Plant Swap and a Special Raffle for both members and guests alike. If you want to participate in the Gift Swap, bring a clean, labeled plant to swap for a plant someone else has brought to exchange.

Party Refreshments

Our members never disappoint with the food they provide for our parties and we look forward to seeing and eating the culinary delights, from appetizers to desserts, you will provide this year.

LAST MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

Program

Bruce Holst gave us a presentation titled *Belize: Into the Deep* that took us on a 2014 expedition into the 425-foot deep Nohoch Ch'en cenote (i.e., sinkhole) located in the Chiquibul National Park in the Chiquibul Wilderness in western Belize, the most remote, rugged, unexplored location in the country. (See aerial views below). The goals of the 10-day expedition were to survey geological features around and in the cenote, descend into the cenote and record and study the flora and fauna there and collect botanical specimens.



Chiquibul Wilderness and Nohoch Ch'en cenote (lower right)



Close up of Nohoch Ch'en sinkhole

The expedition was part of a larger project to document the biodiversity of the Chiquibul Wilderness in order to promote conservation of it and make the world aware of its uniqueness and value as a World Heritage Site. Belize has a vast, diverse flora with about 4,000 plant species, 60 of which are bromeliads, and this expedition was also part of a project to create a comprehensive guide to the bromeliads and other epiphytes in all the districts of Belize. The project is supported in part by the owners of Caves Branch Botanical Gardens, a 15-acre garden that is mostly epiphytes and considered to be the best garden in Central America.

Bruce has a history in Belize where he has worked on various epiphyte-related projects since the 1990s. He is currently the Director of Botany for the Marie Selby Botanical Gardens in Sarasota, and his participation in the Belize expedition aligned with their mission to understand, conserve and bring awareness to threatened and endangered wild ecosystems in the tropical world.

The area in western Belize in which the Nohoch Ch'en sinkhole is located has been subjected to incursions from Guatemala with whom Belize share a border to the west. This trespassing has resulted in illegal logging, mining, hunting, and looting of Mayan artifacts. And because the area is remote and rugged, it is difficult for Belize to conduct law enforcement efforts to halt these illegal activities. An additional goal of the trip was to assess the level of illegal activities in the region. Fittingly, Bruce subtitled his talk *Belize is at War and Doesn't Even Know It*. The picture below shows large areas of deforestation in Guatemala (on the left) where it abuts the remote and vegetated western portion of Belize (on the right).



On the expedition Holst joined 19 other scientists and staff from Caves Branch Jungle Lodge and Botanical Gardens, the Belize Forest Department, and a non-governmental agency, the Friends for Conservation Development. Also on the team were armed park guards for safety in the event they ran into skirmishes with illegal trespassers. They were also aided by students from the University of Belize. The team and necessary equipment and transport vehicles assembled at the Caves Branch Jungle Lodge (picture below) where they stayed while they made preparations for the trip.



Dense forest (picture below, left) and muddy, uneven terrain (picture below, right) made slow going, often taking hours to go as little as a mile. Numerous times vehicles became stuck in thick mud and had to be winched free.



Bruce said he had been forewarned by others who had worked in the area there was an abundance of two things — orchids and snakes. He showed pictures of at least two venomous snakes, including a fer-de-lance, that they encountered. Along the way, they also saw a large number of orchids and bromeliads in trees and on the ground (pictures below).



The team established a base camp near the sinkhole and then trekked to the top of it each day from the camp. It is believed this sinkhole has probably been explored only once before, in 2000 by a British and Belizean team that did not collect any specimens. Over the years the sinkhole has filled in to some extent with boulders, soil and vegetation. Around the top of the sinkhole they found overgrown remnants of Mayan temple mounds and tombs, and agricultural terraces.

Some of the team rappelled down from the top of the sinkhole along an exposed 30-foot wall (picture on right) onto a ledge that they could then walk down further into the hole. As they rappelled down the wall, they spotted a cave in the sinkhole wall in which there were a number of clay pots that are believed to be Mayan and up to 1,500 to 1,600 years old.



The sinkhole's interior, like the land surface around it, was lush and rich with flora, especially epiphytes. They noted that the humidity increased with depth as did the number of epiphytes, which might

reasonably be expected as a result of the higher humidity. At the bottom, they set about recording and studying as much of the flora and fauna as possible. There they spotted a ceiba tree that was estimated to be an impressive 150 feet high.

Back at the Caves Branch Jungle Lodge they organized, documented, recorded, and packaged both live plants and herbarium specimens (pictures below). The team collected an estimated 400 species, of which 250 were live specimens and 280 were processed into herbarium specimens. Both the live and pressed specimens were then sorted, shared and deposited at the Marie Selby Botanical Gardens, Caves Branch Botanical Gardens, and the Belize Forestry Department, while herbarium specimens were sent to the National Herbarium of Belize. As part of the project, the team had the opportunity to train the Caves Branch Botanical Gardens' horticulturists on how to collect and cultivate plants and to make herbarium specimens. Additional descents into the Nohoch Ch'en and other sinkholes will hopefully take place on future trips and add to the material collected to date.



Botanical specimens collected



Documenting, recording, packaging specimens

Pressing herbarium specimens



Photo credits: Bruce Holst, Tony Rath, National Geographic Magazine, Ella Baron

Election of 2016 Officers and Trustee

At the November meeting members elected the following individuals to the 2016 nine-member Board of Directors:

- | | |
|----------------|---|
| President | Ashley Graham |
| Vice President | Larry Sousa |
| Secretary | John Edwards |
| Treasurer | Gary Lund |
| Trustee | Sal Vactor (three-year term, 2016 through 2018) |

Show and Tell

Reported by Helga Tarver

- Marty Baxley Hybrids by Marty:
- *Billbergia* 'Fay' x 'Lou Wilson' (picture below); ('Fay' is an old hybrid of Marty's named after past member Fay O'Rourke)
 - *Neoregelia* 'Domino' x 'Marble Throat' (picture below)
 - *Neoregelia* 'Jungle Gem' ('Treasure Chest' x *concentrica*; picture below)
- Hohenbergia* 'Karla' (albomarginated *magnispina*; picture below)
- Cookie Fernandez *Vriesea* 'Flamea' x *corcovadensis*
- Gary Lund *Aechmea*, the same hybrid as the spineless one in the picture he submitted to the November newsletter
- Frane Matwijczyk *Canistropsis correia-araujo*, mounted at the January plant mounting program
- Nidularium* (unknown species or hybrid)
- Larry Sousa Four plants mounted at the January plant mounting program:
- *Aechmea* 'Foster's Favorite' (picture below)
 - *Neoregelia* 'Superball'
 - *Canistropsis elata*
 - *Tillandsia ionantha* 'Fuego'

Show and Tell plants



Billbergia 'Fay' x 'Lou Wilson'



Neoregelia 'Jungle Gem'



Neoregelia 'Domino' x 'Marble Throat'

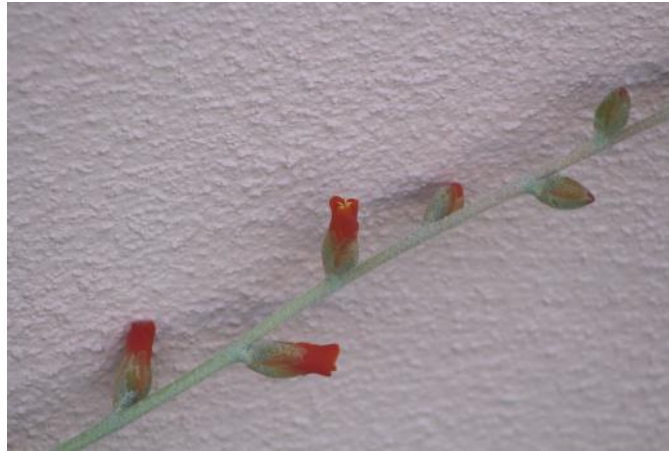


Hohenbergia 'Karla'



Aechmea 'Foster's Favorite'

BLOOMING THIS MONTH



Dyckia, species or hybrid unknown; submitted by Gary Lund who says this small green Dyckia is a strange one because it is blooming in November while nearly all of his Dyckias bloom in mid- to late spring and the flowers on this one are a much darker orange than most Dyckias.



Tillandsia ionantha 'Druid'; submitted by Gary Lund. The 'Druid' forms of *Til. ionantha* are unique in that they blush a creamy white or yellow to pink with white during the blooming cycle instead of red or orange with purple flowers that are typical of other *Til. ionantha* forms.

UPCOMING EVENTS, 2015-2016

December 5-6, 2015, Caloosahatchee Bromeliad Society Sale
Terry Park, 3451 Marion Street, Fort Myers (bprevattpcc@aol.com)

March 12-13, 2016, Leu Gardens Spring Plant Sale
Harry P. Leu Gardens, Orlando, FL (<http://www.leugardens.org>)

April 1-3, 2016, Tropiflora's Spring Festival
Tropiflora Nursery, 3530 Tallavast Road, Sarasota, 941-351-2267 (tropiflora.com)

April 2-3, 2016, GreenFest Plant Sale
University of Tampa, Tampa, FL (friendsofplantpark.com/greenfest)

June 13-19, 2016, 22nd World Bromeliad Conference, Houston, Texas
(<http://www.bsi.org/new/conference-corner/>)

2015 FWCBS BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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