FLORIDA WEST COAST BROMELIAD SOCIETY

1954-2020

Celebrating over 66 Years in Bromeliads

fwcbs.org

July 2020 Newsletter

NEXT MEETING

Date: ~~Tuesday, July 7~~ CANCELLED

The FWCBS Board of Directors has cancelled our July meeting due to the ongoing health concerns associated with the national coronavirus/COVID-19 epidemic. Our Board will review the situation later this month and make a determination about the August meeting at that time.

LAST MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

LAST MONTH'S PROGRAM

There is no program to report for the June meeting because the meeting was cancelled due the COVID-19 epidemic. This issue of our monthly newsletter features a summary of a February 2016 program presented by Andy Siekkinen titled *Hechtia: The Oft Ignored (and usually Cursed at) Genus of Mexican Bromeliads*. Andy is a member of the San Diego Bromeliad Society and owner of Eagle Eye Adventures, a company that offers cultural and botanical tours to Mexico.

Andy Siekkinen

At the time of his presentation in 2016, Andy had been traveling and studying Hechtias (along with all other bromeliads) in Mexico for six years. Using some of the newest genetic techniques, he studied their evolutionary relationships and worked on descriptions of several new species and introducing new species into cultivation. His presentation summarized the studies and work he had been pursuing. Below are some highlights of his talk.

- *Hechtia* is the sole genus of the subfamily *Hechtioideae* and is named for Julius Gottfried Conrad Hecht (1771–1837), a German counselor to the King of Prussia.
- Hechtia are among the genera of so-called succulent bromeliads that also include *Dyckia, Encholirium,* and *Deuterocohnia*. These are not true succulents but can be grown in the same manner. They do not hold water in their tissue the way true succulents do. Instead, they slow their growth when water is not available.
- Hechtia grow in areas that are primarily arid and thrive in bright, sunny deserts.
- Hechtia are terrestrial or lithophytic. They grow primarily in limestone habitat with a calcareous (basic) soil and can also be found in granitic habitats with siliceous (acidic) soil.

- There are about 80 *Hechtia* species, 30 of which have been discovered over the preceding eight years [i.e., prior to 2016]. Many species have not yet been studied and/or their taxonomy needs to be updated. [Note: Based on current taxonomic reassignments, the number of Hechtia species today is about 70.]
- Hechtia evolved about 15 million years ago in northern South America and today grow only in native habitats north of Panama. Distributed primarily throughout Mexico, a few species are also found in Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Texas.
- While most Hechtia have a terminal inflorescence (growing from the center of the plant), some species grow lateral inflorescences, that is, growing from the side rather then the center of the plant. Pictures below show two species with lateral inflorescences.

Hechtia glauca with lateral inflorescence
(Source: FCBS.org)

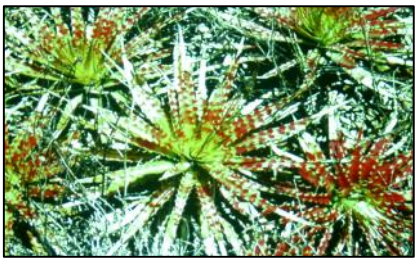
Hechtia stenopetala with lateral inflorescence
(Source: FCBS.org)

- All Hechtia except for *Hechtia gayorum* are dioecious, which means they are either male or female. They are also dimorphic, which means features such as color, shape, and size structure differ between males and females of the same species. Their flowers and branching structures of their inflorescences also differ, as shown below for *Hechtia zamudioi*.

Hechtia zamudioi, male on left, female on right

- Most Hechtia have creamy-white or white flowers and they are pollinated primarily by bees.
- Their seeds are about 3/8-inch long (pictured on the right) and have hooks on them that allow them to stick to animal fur and bird feathers to facilitate their distribution.

- Variable habitat conditions, such as sunlight and seasonal rain periods, can result in different colors in the same species, for example, *Hechtia sphaeroblasta* pictured below.




Hechtia sphaeroblasta, growing in different conditions

- Difficulties that arise in describing and identifying *Hechtia* species include the following:
    - Features within a species are almost always variable depending on their sex and/or habitat.
    - Colors can change with season, such as dry and wet periods.
    - Plant specimens preserved for study are incomplete or have been destroyed.
    - Plant collection data such as the name of the town or city where a species was collected have been forgotten, lost, or no longer exist.
    - Some plants are large and hard to collect.

THIS AND THAT

One Way (Not) to Trim Bromeliads

We have a neighbor who had three large clumps of x*Androlaechmea* 'O'Rourke', three to four feet high (example on right), in his front yard that were healthy and bloomed with regularity. Note that **'**had' is the operative word here. About three weeks ago while on one of my regular 'power walks' (or so I call them) through the neighborhood, I spotted the neighbor in his front yard, groaning and grunting, sweating and swearing, as he whacked at the three clumps with a machete. As I approached, he stood back, hands on hips, to assess his handiwork, pictured below.

x*Androlaechmea* 'O'Rourke'

One of three clumps of dozens of formerly healthy and robust x*Androlaechmea* 'O'Rourke'

Close up of clump remnants, three weeks after being cut

The neighbor turned to me and said he was just trimming the bromeliads, and was certain they would grow back fuller. I stopped, aghast at the massive damage he had inflicted on

the clumps while trying to hide my astonishment. He was aware that I grow bromeliads and asked my opinion of his work. (Shudder here, for I always have some sort of opinion to give freely.) Steadying myself, I said that bromeliads are not like a hibiscus bush or other similar shrub that will put out more leaves after it is trimmed, and I launched into a short explanation of the bromeliad life cycle, how they grow their leaves, the set number of leaves, and so on. Just before his eyes began to glaze over, he asked 'Have I killed them?" "Well," I responded, "you have done them no favor." He said he would wait a week or two to see if any pups come up. I wanted to tell him that pups would be unlikely without a healthy mother plant to provide nutrients to them. I wanted to tell him how he could have easily dug them up, as they have very shallow roots, and then cut away dead plants and replanted younger healthy ones. I wanted to tell him…but I refrained from further comment, which, if you know me, was hard to do. He shrugged his shoulders, turned, and headed inside for a beer. I continued on my walk. Sigh.

Aechmea pectinata

Aechmea pectinata is one of my favorite bromeliads (example on right). I think it is often overlooked because, when it is not grown in the right amount of light, it can be just another green plant, and its bloom stalk, when it decides to produce one (about which it is shy), is a non-descript, pale green color, not unlike the color of the plant. The flowers are also a non-descript pale grey-green color.

Over the years, I accumulated many *Aec. pectinata* via offsets and shared them freely with neighbors and friends until one day I realized, sadly, that I had none left. My next door neighbor had grown a large cluster of them (picture below on left) from ones I had given her, and this year there were six inflorescences among them. Four of them are in the picture below on the left (look closely), and a close up of two of them is below on the right. This is the first time I can remember any in this cluster ever producing a bloom stalk.

Clump of *Aechmea pectinata*

Aec. pectinata inflorescences

Aec. pectinata grows as a terrestrial, epiphytic or saxicolous plant and is native to south-southeastern Brazil where it occurs in restinga scrub. Restingas are areas of coastal forests, a dry environment with sandy, acidic, nutrient-poor soils. Hummingbirds are its main pollinator, about 90% of the time, with insects (primarily bees and butterflies) pollinating the remainder of the time. The hummingbirds are not attracted to the plants by their pale grey-

green flowers but rather the brightly colored red leaves and bracts. The flowers have a narrow opening, easy for a hummingbird to enter and not so much for the insects.

I like this bromeliad for a number of reasons: the shape of its leaves, the bright red color on the outer half of its leaves when it is in bloom, its odd, though infrequent, bloom stalk, and because it can grow in full sun and is hardy. When my neighbor with the large clump realized I had no more of them, she offered me to take some of hers. I now have a modest cluster of them growing in the sun in the backyard. Bromeliads: the gift that keeps on giving.

IN THE GARDEN THIS MONTH



Ursulaea tuitensis, one of only two species in the genus



Aechmea ‘Electrica (Electra)’; (*A. dealbata* x (*miniata* v. *discolor* x *fasciata*))


Aechmea ‘Blue Moon’ (an *Aec. fendleri* hybrid of unknown parentage)

Vriesea 'Sidewinder' (*V. simplex* x *V. warmingii*); a Grant Groves hybrid

Richard Poole submitted the pictures below of a Billbergia in his collection.

Billbergia rosea

UPCOMING EVENTS, 2020

To date, it appears plant events such as shows and sales typically scheduled for this time of year have been cancelled or postponed. This section will be updated as more information becomes available. If you hear of such events scheduled, please let me know.

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