

The Florida East Coast Bromeliad Society

Next regularly scheduled meeting Sunday, January 13th, 2003 – 1:30p.m.

January, 2003

Happy New Year 2003!

President – Mike Fink – 386/673-5450

Vice President – Linda Stagnol – 386/760-6842

Secretary – Calandra Thurrott - 386/761-4804

Treasurer - Ted Nuse - 386/673-2648

Here we are with a brand new year, a new slate of officers, money in the treasury, and an enthusiastic group of members! I'm hearing of some exciting programs lined up for the year ahead including guest speakers, field trips and workshops so, don't be left out - mark the dates on your calendar now for all of this year's meetings – you won't want to miss a single one!

This month's meeting - Mounting

bromeliads. Everyone admires a nice arrangement of bromeliads set on driftwood and it can be a lot of fun creating one of these pieces.

This month we will work on using Tillandsias, cedar tree branches, wire and glue to create a unique piece.

Council of Garden Clubs Rummage Sale –

The Halifax Council of Garden Clubs is having a rummage sale on Saturday, January 11th as a fund raiser and is asking for everyone to help out by either attending or contributing items for sale. Sale starts at 8a.m. (if anyone can get out of bed early enough) and will run throughout the day. The Council is particularly interested in plants that can be sold to the public (after all, it is a garden club!), but would be glad to accept any

items that you would be willing to donate for this sale. Please contact any of your officers for details about making donations.

Tillandsia utriculata

T. utriculata is releasing its seeds now in our area. If you've never seen the seeds of this plant before you better look now. They don't usually hang around very long - a puff of wind and they're gone!

The Florida form of this plant doesn't produce the prettiest bloom (the flowers are usually a dull ivory color on a pale bloom spike, although occasionally the bloom spike takes on a reddish color), but this is really quite an interesting bromeliad. For one thing, the mature plant is by far the largest of the Fl. native bromeliads and can reach some impressive dimensions. Leaves can easily exceed 3' in length under good growing conditions, so you can imagine that this makes for a pretty good size plant. For another, I've never known T. utriculata to produce offsets – it reproduces exclusively by seed (the term for this type of plant behavior is “monocarpy”). Sometimes a clump of T. utriculatas may appear to have offsets, but

invariably these turn out to be seedlings of various ages that have lodged at the base of an older plant.

I've read several articles that say that *T. utriculata* "rarely" produces offsets and I've always wondered if anyone has actually seen an offset on one of these plants. I don't know anyone who has admitted to seeing a *T. utriculata* that produced pups and I suspect that such a plant doesn't exist, at least as a Fl. native. Yet still, authors are reluctant to make this statement on the off-chance that there may be an exception out there somewhere. I really don't think anyone would try to sue them for making a false statement should the rare *utriculata* pup turn up, but maybe that's a concern?

T. utriculatas were once commonly found in this area. Frank Cowan used to tell of the oak trees in Tomoka Park in Ormond Beach being full of them in the mid-'50s to '60s and very early photos show trees limbs with "wild pines" as they are sometimes called in the Daytona Beach area.

Sadly, between the clearing of land for roads and new housing developments much of the prime habitat for this plant has been destroyed. Add to this the killing freezes of the mid-70's and 80's and *T. utriculata* has become a bit of a rarity in the Daytona Beach area. I'm aware of several small colonies in Port Orange, one in South Daytona and one on Madison Ave. (of all places!) in Daytona Beach, but otherwise we appear to be on the northern fringe of *T. utriculata*'s habitat. If any Mexican weevils move into our area they very well may starve to death before they find a *T. utriculata* to feed on!

T. utriculatas in my care usually bloom in February, with the seed pods maturing and releasing seeds the following December. Enormous quantities of seeds are

produced and that's a good thing since relatively few of these, dispersed in the wild survive to become mature plants. How long does it take to grow a mature, blooming plant from seed? Art Hyland spread quite a few seeds on a bay tree at the Garden Center where we meet in 1994. Here we are, 8 years later and barely a handful of juvenile plants can be seen where he distributed those seeds. If I had to guess, I would say that they have a few years to go yet before blooming – and that's assuming they survive. I'm sure that under better growing conditions the time necessary to reach maturity could be reduced significantly, but remember – we're on the northern fringe of the natural habitat for this plant. Being on the receiving end of some pretty cold weather on occasion slows development considerably.

If we can help nature along by spreading a few of these seeds to trees that are not likely to be taken down by developers



T. Utriculata – courtesy of the FCBS website

we may be able to broaden the territory where this plant is currently found. *T. utriculata* is truly a magnificent plant, one

that many people picture in their minds when they think of the “Florida wilds”, and one that we should do our best to protect.

Boggy Creek Bromeliads has closed.

Florida must have more bromeliad nurseries than any other state in the country except perhaps California, but we’ve lost a few real gems through the years. It’s been roughly two years since the Johnsons’ ‘Pineapple Place’ closed their doors and now Boggy Creek Bromeliads has gone out of business. It’s a bit of a melancholy event when a bromeliad nursery closes after being in business for many years and this was no exception. We travelled to Kissimmee on the Saturday after Thanksgiving and it was nice to see so many friends who we’ve come to know from bromeliad societies throughout the state – bromeliad people are just the nicest people! It was exciting to be part of the frenzy of shopping in a greenhouse full of different and unusual plants – it looked like Wal Mart on the first shopping day after Thanksgiving, although without the shopping carts! But there was also a touch of sadness in knowing that the McCrorys were selling off a collection that had obviously been very dear to them and had taken so long to acquire. One of my selections was an Orthophytum with a name tag showing the words “Carol Johnson” after the plant name. This was probably a plant that had been collected by the owner of Pineapple Place at some time in the past, then had been shared with the McCrorys and now was out-surviving it’s second nursery home. I guess that typifies these plants – they’re survivors, and although nurseries may come and go, the plants live on...taking with them memories and an ever richer history!

What’s Blooming?

We’ve been having some unusual cold and wet weather recently and maybe that’s why the *Ae. disticanthas* in my yard are blooming so early. For the past 6 years they have been blooming in March, so why have they begun putting up bloom spikes in December this year?

Pitcairnia spicata is in bloom right now – I really don’t know quite what to make of this plant. I planted a clump of these at the base of an oak tree some years ago and now every year it seems to get bigger...and I mean really bigger! This year the leaves are easily 5’ long and the bloom spike is well over 6’ high. Very nice plant, but it can’t keep getting bigger each year forever can it? It makes me wonder about some of the other terrestrials that we typically grow in pots – how big would they be after a few years in the ground?

Lots of *Billbergias* have been coming into bloom in November and December: *Billbergia* ‘Fiesta’ (labelled ‘Fantasia’, but I’m convinced now that this is ‘Fiesta’), the Australian hybrid ‘Ken Allen’, ‘Pink Champagne’, ‘Windii’, something I call *chlorosticta* (but may be a hybrid), *distachia*, *leptopoda* – and it’s a good thing that there are lots of them because each bloom only lasts a short time.

My *Ae. orlandianas* are looking especially good this year with bloom spikes up in time for the holidays. These plants are never real consistent in their blooming in my yard, but they generally bloom somewhere between Nov. and Feb.

Other plants, like *Ae. gamosepala*, in bloom now send spikes up each year within a few weeks of the previous year’s time of bloom. This is also a great year for the variegated form: ‘Lucky Stripes’. Both of

these are terrific plants - great choices for the landscape and as cold hardy as you will ever see. If you don't already have these in your collection, you'll want to acquire them.

Some of the little *Ae. recurvatas* and their hybrids are in bloom now also. *Ae. 'Suenos'* and what is labelled *Ae. 'pimenti-veloci'*, (but according to Mr. Butcher is actually 'Pie in the Sky' – although after seeing his latest pictures of this plant, now I'm concerned about what has been labelled as *Ae. comata variegata* – ...sigh, it never ends) are lending some color to my deck. Even some of the bigger *Aechmeas*... like an old favorite – 'Bert' are in bloom going into the New Year.

Upcoming events:

Jan. 11th, 2003 – Rummage sale fund raiser at the Garden Center in Daytona Beach.(837 N. Oleander)

Mar. 13-16 – Everybody's Flower Show at the Ocean Center in Daytona Beach

May 10, 11th – Central Florida Society's annual Mother's Day Show/Sale at the Florida Mall in Orlando

From the Web -

I realize that many of our group don't have access to computers on a regular basis, so I will try to pass along interesting tid-bits from the internet as they turn up. The following is a communication received from BSI's Cultivar Registration Chairman - Derek Butcher a.k.a 'Uncle Derek' of Australia:

I have already reported to you the problems in Brazil where the Press blame bromeliads as soon as there is a Dengue (that would be

*the mosquito vectored illness known as Dengue Fever - editor's note) epidemic and thousands of plants are destroyed. Here is some information that probably won't appear as headlines in the major Brazilian Newspapers! It comes from the Brazilian Environmental Agency. Plants on the endangered list now include. *Aechmea apocalyptica, A. blumenavii, A. kleinii, A. pimenti-velosoi, Billbergia alfonsi-joannis, Dyckia cabrerae, D. distachya, D.hatschbachii, D. ibiramensis, Vriesea biguassuensis, V.brusquensis, V.mulleri, V.pinottii, and V. triangularis.* If you are growing these species I suggest you take special care of them.*

...And another note of interest. This one is from Charlie Dills of California concerning the issue of separating and potting of *Aechmea* pups:

*I had an *Aechmea weilbachii* var. *leodiensis* that had three large and apparently identical pups. So I thought I would try something. I cut them off and placed them in an empty pot, potted one in about ten days, one after a month and the third when it began to look stressed in four months! Six months later you couldn't see the difference. And this plant is in what I would call the soft group. Hard ones, like *Quesnelia arvensis*, probably don't care whether they are potted or not!*

