



Petal Tones

The Newsletter of the National Capital Area Chapter of
The Gesneriad Society

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Message from the President

Today is the last day of February. Snow and sleet are predicted for tonight and tomorrow. Will Spring ever get here? YES it will. And before you know it, we'll be into Summer and Convention. This month's meeting should be an extra special one for all of us. Not only will we hear a great talk on *Petrocosmea*, but we have some special tubers and rhizomes to sell off to members from David Harris. David won't be able to attend our Convention, but will be sending a couple hundred tubers for the plant sales room. These early arrivals are "to be used as a fundraiser" for our local group. Since we don't have any plant sales planned I thought that we could put them out for sale along side the raffle plants. And then once the raffle starts anything left could become part of the raffle.

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Next Meeting: Tim Tuttle on *Petrocosmea*

Tim Tuttle will be speaking about *Petrocosmea*. Tim will be a speaker at the Annual Convention of The Gesneriad Society in July 2009.

Please remember to bring plants for the Little Show, raffle table contributions, and food.

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Clockwise from top left: *Columnea orientadina*, *Columnea* sp., raffle table, *Kohleria* 'Peridot's Rolo' from the February meeting Little Show.

Upcoming Events and 2009 Meetings:

Next Meeting: Saturday March 14, 2009

10:30 – doors open
11:00 – program begins
11:45-12:15 – Raffle and Little Show Entries
12:15-12:30 – Little Show (everyone should bring at least one plant for show every month)
12:30-1:00 – Socializing & Lunch
1:00-2:00 – Business Meeting

Meetings are at the National Arboretum, Washington, D.C. New members are welcome – please introduce yourself for a free plant.

Meetings in 2009:

4/11/09, 5/9/09, 6/13/09 (pre-Convention meeting)
6/30-7/4/09 – The Gesneriad Society Convention (location: Silver Spring, MD)
9/12/09, 10/10/09, 12/12/09

New *Aeschyanthus* Species

by Aarti Shah

In December 2008, the World Wildlife Fund ("WWF") issued a report on an amazing number of new species which have been discovered in the Greater Mekong region, the area comprising the basin of the 3000-mile long Mekong River including Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, and the Yunnan Province of China. According to the report, over 1,000 new species have been discovered in this area in the past ten years alone.



© Royal Botanic Gardens at Edinburgh. Photograph by David Middleton.

The report, which is 40 pages long and available via the December 17, 2008 press release on the WWF's website,¹ is fascinating, and includes one item of particular interest. It states that in 2007, a new *Aeschyanthus*, *A. mendumiae*, was found 850 meters (approx. 2750 ft) high on the southeastern slopes of Phou Yang, a mountain in southeast Laos. The Appendix lists another: *A. minutifolius*.

As you can see in the pictures, *A. mendumiae* is a beautiful species with delicately mottled leaves, flowers that have yellow tubes with bright red openings, star-like calyces and red stamens and pollen. It's a beautiful plant, and I look forward to learning more about it.

¹ <http://www.worldwildlife.org/who/media/press/2008/WWFPresitem11027.html>



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Help Wanted!

After getting our **website** off to a great start and maintaining it so well since then, Jim Hipple is asking us to find someone else to take it over. If you have web experience and want to help in this, please see me at the meeting. Ki and I are already planning to get the necessary software to maintain it, but if you've got the skills please see me.

Jim Roberts

Wishlists

Doris E. Hill:
Sinningia 'Bewitched'

Mark Zukaitis:
Mark is looking for material to propagate on his windowsill(s) for the Convention.
Sinningia braziliensis
Codonanthe devosiana
Any *Columnea*
Any *xCodonanthe*

Beverly Nissen:
Streptocarpus starter plants

...cont. from page 1

For those of you who don't know him, David is an extraordinary *Sinningia* hybridizer (minis and compacts). He has many spectacular doubles and singles which consistently win him awards at AV and Gesneriad shows.

I haven't asked Tim Tuttle yet, but I assume that Tim will also be bringing some plants to sell. So bring a little extra cash with you this month. And, as a friendly reminder, this is the last meeting where you can pick up plants for entry in the Convention show. Flower Show rules state that the plants entered in the horticulture section of the show must have been in the grower's possession for 3 months prior to the show. That means April 2 is the absolute deadline for getting show plants. Plants obtained after that can still be used in arrangements, decorative plantings or terrariums, but not as "show plants" *per se*.

Three months is still plenty of time to get your plants ready. Start to shape them now. Trim off any growth that ruins the symmetry of the plant so that new growth can fill in the trimmed area. Disbud *Saintpaulia* and *Streps* until the end of April or May, depending on the variety. This will result in a bigger burst of bloom when the plants are finally allowed to show their stuff. Start cuttings of anything healthy that you trim off the plants you are growing for show. Even leaves have time between now and July to send up plantlets that can be divided up and sold. Start planning your arrangements and gathering interestingly shaped twigs, stones, and vines from your yard or while walking through the woods. They're a lot easier to see now than they will be once they're covered with leaves. Find containers for dish gardens (tray landscapes) and terrariums and start gathering together the plants you want to use in them.

Convention will be a lot of work by all of us, but we've got some really dedicated hard workers in this group to make all that effort pay off in a lot of fun. Once you've been to a convention, you'll want to keep on going back – not just for the plants, but to see the friends you'll make and can look forward to seeing again every year.

Jim

Growing Gesneriads for Show

by Carol Hamelink

Now is the time to go through your plant stands and evaluate what you are growing with an eye toward identifying potential show plants. With 4 months to go until the show, there is still time to make changes that will lead to better plants with show potential. The various genera are quite different in their preparations for show. In general, to stimulate blooming you can increase the temperature of the room and/or increase the lighting. Now is a good time to replace one bulb in your light fixtures. This will give more lumens to your plants. As the show gets nearer, you can also increase the time you have the lights on.

Sinningias are among some of the easiest to deal with. This is the time to remove the old growing stems and allow new growth to start. This is also a good time to give the tubers a new clean pot. While I'm at it, I like to take off some of the old roots and examine the tubers.



Close up of a *Sinningia* sp. 'Florianopolis' tuber, with old stems removed.

Sometimes you'll have more than one in a pot and will want to separate them. Of course there is some risk involved – sometimes tubers don't start up again right away. Be sure to root the growing tips you've cut off as insurance. If the tuber grows, now you've got a starter plant for the sales table. I put both the tubers and the cutting in a humid environment, under a dome for a couple of weeks to try to

encourage them. With spring coming, most of the tubers seem to know this and restart quite readily.

When the growth is big enough to easily see, I take the sprouted tubers out from the dome and move them into the plant stand. Be sure to watch them carefully for the first couple of days for signs of wilting or wicks that aren't drawing. To keep the new growth compact, elevate the tuber so that it is close to the light source, adjusting the pot's distance to the light as it grows. Miniature *Sinningias* often look best with a single growth stem allowed to grow and flower. As secondary shoots appear, they can be harvested for show plants as well.



Miniature *Sinningia* with one growth each.

Kohlerias are among my favorite gesneriads. This is also a good time to restart them for the midsummer show. If your *Kohleria* is already mature and blooming, chances are it will be overgrown and done flowering by midsummer. Now is the time to take it apart and start any rhizomes you find. You can also cut down the growing tips and restart them as cuttings. Since gesneriads are notoriously hard to time for show (especially the blooms), I try to start a couple of pots at different stages, hoping that one of them will end up being just right for show. The others will be sale plants. When you start from rhizomes, they will not all start at once so you may have to revisit the pots after all the rhizomes are up and space them out, grouping like sized ones together. Tip cuttings will need to be started either under a dome for several weeks until roots can form, or they can be started to root in water on a shelf. Once roots begin they will still need to be put in a humid environment for a couple of weeks. Give them

a slight tug to test if rooted before removing from the humid environment. These will need to be watched daily for signs of wilting. I usually bring them out for a few hours a day to harden them off.



Three sizes of *Kohleria hirsuta*. Hopefully one will be just right in time for the show.

Chiritas can also be hard to get to bloom on time for show. Luckily the ones with variegation in the leaves can be entered in non-blooming categories. To tune up potential plants for show, I remove any leaves that have brown tips if they are not necessary to complete the rosette shape. If this leads to a bit of a neck, repot the plant. Your choices are to either go to a slightly larger pot, or root prune and go back into the same size pot. In general, *Chiritas* like to be underpotted, so I usually end up slicing off the bottom 1/2 to one inch of the root ball and going back into the same size pot with new soil on top to cover the neck. Depending on how much root is removed, these may or may not need a humid environment afterward: just be sure to keep an eye on them.

Episcias, as Lee Linnett told us last year, may require 6 months to make a beautiful show plant. But, if you've got them and they need tuning up, you may as well go for it now. You might get lucky, as some grow faster than others. *Episcias* seem to be very sensitive to the onset of spring and often exhibit vigorous growth as temperatures start to warm. Start several similar sized stolons in a pot and cover them for a week or so. They root very quickly. Remember to remove any new stolons until your base plant has filled in.

Saintpaulias are very easy to grow. As a consequence, to do well in a show they must be near perfection. The best growers in the country use a regular schedule for repotting or potting up, doing it every three months for maximum growth and to avoid any obvious signs of culture break. But nevermind that. To get your African Violet to look as good as it can, you should repot it now. Examine it carefully, you still have time to train errant leaves that aren't growing quite where they should for the perfect rosette. I use something like a bobby pin that I can clip onto the pot and, over the course of weeks, slowly move the leaf to the location I want. The Gesneriad Society follows the recommendations of the AVSA (African Violet Society of America) for classification into standard (greater than 8 inches in diameter), semiminiature (less than 8 inches in diameter), miniature (less than 6 inches in diameter), and trailer (any size but must have 3 or more growing tips on the plant) categories. So look up the variety you are growing and make sure it is not too large (too small is not penalized). African Violets are relatively easy to time to bloom at the right time. To do this you need to remove all bloom stalks that you see for the next 2 months. Eight weeks before the show, you can let those that are double bloomers start to flower, and only 6 weeks are needed for single blossoms. These are only guidelines, but a good place to start. There are some things to do to speed along or slow down blooming. We'll talk about those as the show gets closer.



Mauro is a very gracious host, and was able to arrange his schedule so that we could spend three glorious days hunting down gesneriads. I took a bus from São Paulo to Moji das Cruzes after my last business meeting on Friday. Mauro picked me up at the bus station and we went out to dinner. It had been a long day of meetings for me, so after dinner we went back to his place, chatted for a while and I went to bed early.

The weather on Saturday was very much like what São Paulo had been experiencing for the previous two weeks: cloudy, drizzly, very warm and humid. Because of the threat of rain, we decided to limit that day's travels to a farm close to where Mauro lived. The owner of the farm is working at converting it to a sanctuary where plants and animals native to the region could be protected. We got to the farm only to find that the owners were not home. On our way out, after having passed once again over a plank bridge, we met up with the owners on their way back home.

The farm had some nice walking paths through the woods and along the stream, but there weren't many gesneriads to be found. Lots of bromeliads, begonias, orchids and other highly desirable house plants for us up here in the Northlands. We did find some *N. fritchii* and some *C. devosiana*. I also slipped once on the side of the stream and almost went in (lots of mud on the back of my jeans and shirt) and walked into a mud pit along the path where I sank in to the tops of my waterproof sneakers and ran about 10 feet to get to dry ground before it went over the tops of my sneakers. Luckily Mauro knew what the conditions would be like and we had come in his truck.

Brazil Plants – A Visit with Mauro

by Jim Roberts

One of the perks of my job (my wife disagrees with the term "perks") is getting to travel to different parts of the world. This year my company decided to hold its international sales meeting at a resort in Salvador, Brazil. A really nice place to visit but not nearly as enjoyable for me as the three days I was able to spend with Mauro Peixoto at his home outside of São Paulo.



Top and left: *Nematanthus fritchii*. Bottom right: *Codonanthe devosiana*.

On Sunday Mauro wanted to take me to see some better plants. There is a mountain about 2½ hours from his house. I forget if it's the second tallest peak in São Paulo state or in Brazil, but the peak was just a little over 6000 feet. On our way up, we stopped along the road to photograph some *S. magnifica* and *S. allagophylla*. The *S. magnifica* was growing among and between rocks whereas the *S. allagophylla* was growing in an area that seemed to support more plant variety. Mauro told me that the *S. allagophylla* had been in full bloom a few weeks earlier, but what we saw were mostly red-orange stalks with just a few, if any, open flowers and lots of unripe seed pods.

We passed numerous large hotels and guest houses on the way up. The peak is a popular winter resort where they actually get a little snow in the winter. Just before getting to the top Mauro pulled into a

dirt parking area on the side of the road and told me that this is where we would find the better plants of *S. magnifica*. Walking over the wet, moss-covered rocks going down the hill by the side of the road was a little slow. One misstep would have hurt a lot, and I was already nursing a fractured wrist and a large gash on my leg held together with a dozen stitches. The plants really were magnificent. All different sizes, some as individual plants while others seemed to be colonies with multiple tubers.



S. magnifica (left) and *S. allagophylla* (right), part way up a 6000 ft mountain about 2.5 hours from Mauro's home.

Stepping down off a rock to get a better shot of one small cluster I stepped on some very soft earth. While getting ready to take the shot I felt a lot of something on my foot. I looked down and discovered that the soft earth was in reality a fire-ant nest. My entire sneaker, sock and leg, up to the top of the bandage around the stitches was covered with ants. Needless to say, I wasn't as slow getting up the hill a bit as I was when I went down. A lot of swatting and brushing took care of the problem. Had to take the shoe off and even the sock to get them all, but I survived.

When we got to the top I asked Mauro if there were any on the other side of the road. He had never been down that way. Sure enough, at just about the same distance down this side of the hill, there were large plants of *S. magnifica*. In fact much larger and in better condition than those on the other side. And no ants!



Sinningia magnifica on the other side of the road.

On our way back down the mountain we stopped by some woods where Mauro knew that there was some *N. fornix*. Nothing in flower but I did manage to snap a photo of one in bud. Then Mauro spotted a *S. douglasii* up in a tree. We were looking at a large rhipsalis and higher up in the tree was the tuber of *douglasii*, covered in moss and lichen and with seed pods to boot. We missed the flowering, but I was at last able to see that, yes, some *Sinningia* are indeed epiphytic.



Sinningia douglasii growing epiphytically.

Monday we went to the beach. Not to swim, but to find some plants that a friend of Mauro's had sent him a picture of and a location. The picture looked like *S. aggregata* but this was a new location for it. Mauro had the GPS coordinates for it, and we were able to park on the street within 100 yards of the rocks where the plants were growing. They were *S. aggregata*, and a very nice clone at that. Mauro collected some seeds and a good sized tuber. Here I saw why my *Sinningia* were probably less hurt by the

salt water problem in my house than some of the other genera. Here were plants growing and thriving on bare rocks within 15 or 20 feet of the ocean.



Sinningia aggregata and its tuber lodged in ocean-side rocks.

We stopped at a couple other locations on the coast that day, saw more *N. fritschii*, *C. devosiana*, and *C. gracilis*, and headed back for some rest before my long flight home. I spent hours each day in the greenhouse taking pictures and hearing stories about some of the plants. I went through his seed collection on the last day and made sure I got packets of everything that we had seen in the wild. And I can't wait to see his slides and hear some of his stories at Convention this year. There are a couple of new things that I'm not talking about that will excite everyone in the audience.



Nematanthus fritschii



Codonanthe devosiana



Codonanthe gracilis

If you're ever in Sao Paulo, or plan to be down that way, get in touch with Mauro. The work he is doing to preserve and share not just gesneriads, but many different types of Brazilian plants is amazing. He is a truly special individual.

Next month: Jim Roberts' photographs from Mauro's greenhouse in Brazil.



Mauro Pexioto's greenhouse.

National Capital Area Chapter (NCAC)

A chapter of the Gesneriad Society, Inc.

www.nationalcapitalgesneriads.org

"The purpose of the chapter shall be to afford a convenient and beneficial association of persons interested in gesneriads; to stimulate a widespread interest in the identification, correct nomenclature, culture, and propagation of gesneriads; and to encourage the origination and introduction of new cultivars." (NCAC bylaws, revised April 1981.)

NCAC meets several times a year on the second Saturday of the month in the Administration Building of the U.S. National Arboretum. For details, please refer to the latest issue of *Petal Tones*, the website, or contact one of the people below. All are welcome and new attendees are invited to adopt a free plant.

The Gesneriad Society website: www.gesneriadsociety.org

NCAC website: www.nationalcapitalgesneriads.org

President: Jim Roberts
2408 Henson Dr.
Marriottsville, MD 21104
(410) 549-2409
jim-roberts@hughes.net

Vice President: Brian Connor
3003 E. Monument St.
Baltimore, MD 21205
(443) 845-3423
Brian_Connor@bd.com

Treasurer: Larry Skog
611 Roberts Dr. NW
Vienna, VA 22180
(703) 615-2299
SKOGL@si.edu

Secretary: Denise Whitman

Directors: John Boggan
Jim Christ
Carol Hamelink

Committees: Hospitality: Lee Linett
Membership: John Boggan
Programs: Brian Connor

Newsletter Editor: Kyoko Imai
petaltones@gmail.com
editor@nationalcapitalgesneriads.org

Chapter Website: Jim Hipple
webmaster@nationalcapitalgesneriads.org

Membership: John Boggan
jkb25@cornell.edu
(202) 328-8145