

BROMELIANA

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AECHMEA 'MIRLO' - A SAGA

by Herb Plever

(This article incorporates 'Mirlo' material developed from a lengthy exchange of emails between this writer, Derek Butcher, Geoff Lawn and Michael Kiehl, whose valuable contributions will be discerned from the text.)

Derek, the former BSI Bromeliad Cultivar Registrar is from Adelaide, Australia. Geoff is the current BCR registrar and is from Perth, Australia. Michael is the operator of Michael's Bromeliads Nursery in Venice, FL.)

In the May, 2012 issue of Bromeliana I placed a photo of a plant I had been growing for many years. I had gotten the plant without a label from the late Henry Turner, and I asked if any reader could identify the plant. I received a reply from Michael Kiehl, who stated that the plant in the photo was what he is growing as *Aechmea* 'Mirlo'. (See adjacent photo.) Lyn Wegner (South Africa), Alton Lee (Florida) and Ross Little (Australia) also responded that the plant was *A. 'Mirlo'*.

This was a surprise to me, because I had grown a very different plant labeled *A. 'Mirlo'* that is shown in the 1984 photo on page 2. I checked *A. 'Mirlo'* in Don Beadle's pioneer 1998 Bromeliad Cultivar Registry and found it was listed as a cultivar made before 1970 by Edward Hummel. It was described as:



variegated *Aechmea* from the May Bromeliana, identified as *A. 'Mirlo'*, now called *A. 'Purple Heart'*

"cv. of victoriana v. discolor(?) x orlandiana(?) - (See 'By Golly') - Upright rosette w/strappy copper-amber leaves- also in variable variegated form w/red central stripe called 'Purple Heart'? -softer leaves than 'By Golly' - John Atlee said "It has bright luminescent pink stripes in the center of the leaves, lengthwise, along w/dark stripes embedded in dark red leaves - low light only" - Bromeliad

Treasury 1983 said "Purple black glossy 1½" - 18" leaves...rosette of open graceful arching form..."

The question marks after the putative parents indicate Beadle, our first BCR Registrar, was making an educated guess, necessary because Hummel was extremely secretive and never revealed the parents of his hybrids. Don Beadle thought 'Mirlo' was very similar to *A. 'By Golly'* (*victoriana v. discolor x orlandiana*). The new BCR (<http://www.registry.bsi.org>)

NEXT MEETING - Tuesday, September 4th, 2012 **promptly at 7:00 P.M.** at the [Ripley-Grier Studios 520 8th Ave. \(between 36th & 37th St\) Room 16K](#)

HOW DID YOUR BROMS FARE THIS SUMMER? - Whether grown outside and/or in your apartment, evaluate any changes in their condition and bring a plant to demonstrate your findings. Please bring in plants for sale and for Show and Tell. We'll have some great plants for sale at give-away prices or just to give away from a broken-up collection, so bring some large bags. Many of them are in bloom, so be sure to come to the meeting.

repeated the 1998 description, and the further comment by Derek Butcher in an email to Geoff Lawn: "Mirlo" means "blackbird" in Spanish" was added to the description.

The BCR photos for A. 'Mirlo' showed a plant similar to my "unknown" plant, with



A. 'Mirlo' in Australia by Derek Butcher (from BCR) A. 'Mirlo' (?) 1984 photo from California collection

dark mahogany-red leaves and an upright conformation but with no red striped variegation on the leaves. (But note a suggestion of a stripe on the upper right leaf in that photo shown at the top of this page, about which more later.)

This description was helpful but not definitive, and it raised other questions and issues. To me there is a patent contradiction between "Upright rosette w/strappy copper-amber leaves" and the later Bromeliad Treasury 1983 description of a cultivar (made before 1970) with "Purple black glossy 1½" - 18" leaves...in a rosette of open graceful arching form..." See the above plant I photographed in 1984 in a noted California collection that has an open conformation and dark leaves with a purple-black hue in accord with the Bromeliad Treasury description. It is not an upright plant with mahogany- red leaves like the 'Mirlo' in the BCR photo.

Thus perplexed, I turned to Derek Butcher who has files of original source documents, or access to them, as well as great skill from long years of experience to sort out identification issues in cultivars. And I kept the knowledgeable Geoff Lawn, current BSI Cultivar Registrar, in the loop.

Derek replied that he thought the dark-leaved 1984 photo showed the correct 'Mirlo' and that differences might be attributed to different cultural growing conditions. He added that from the plants grown in Australia he could



A. 'By Golly' pup - Kiehl A. 'Mirlo' pup - Kiehl my A. 'Mirlo' pup

not tell the difference between those called 'Mirlo' and those called 'By Golly', and he suggested I raise this issue with Michael Kiehl.

Michael responded to my query: "I still grow A. 'Mirlo' and A. 'By Golly'. They are

similar in some ways, but 'Mirlo' is the only one that ever shows variegation. Grown in similar conditions the 'Mirlo' has slightly wider leaves and less prominent spines. It's also not as easy to grow with the desired dark foliage. I find these two along with A. 'Perez/Prieto' and 'Black on Black' will become quite black with a little extra fertilizer and less light. The black tends to wash out to ugly red grown here in too bright conditions." Michael attached photos (shown below) that show how the pups look on 'By Golly' and 'Mirlo' with the latter showing variegation on the oldest, lower leaf.

In his response, Geoff Lawn also said that when it is over-exposed, Mirlo's stripes will wash out. Note that my pup, grown in reduced indoor light, shows vivid variegation at the early pup stage. So it appears that variegation is strongly affected by the light the plant gets, as is also indicated in the BCR description by John Atlee who said: "Low light only".

Still, I confess I am troubled by the possibilities that either: the two plants pictured above may not be from the same cross, or that the upright, mahogany- red leaved plant in the BCR photo is just a barely variegated 'Purple Heart'. I can conjecture

(without any hard evidence) that the description "Upright rosette w/strappy copper-amber leaves" was of plants that came out of Florida nurseries, and that the "purple black glossy leave open form" was more or

less restricted to California where Hummel was based in Carlsbad. Kent's Bromeliads in Vista, CA also sold A. 'Mirlo' at that time; it is listed in their 1972 catalog and it is likely they got the plants from Hummel's nursery. (This issue is really academic, because you cannot find any purple-black, non-variegated Mirlos that you can buy and test - at least not in the United States.)

Geoff Lawn dug up a 1984 Shelldance Nursery catalog which lists both *Aechmea* 'Mirlo' and A. 'Mirlo cv. variegata', as a variegated cultivar of 'Mirlo'. This supports the view that we are dealing with two separate cultivars.

In the BCR, *Aechmea* 'Mirlo' - now 'Purple Heart' - is treated as a mutant sport of the original, unvariegated A. 'Mirlo'. If this were true then the genetic DNA of the plant would be unstable; we should see offsets from the same plant with different variegations or a reversion to the original with no variegation. There did not seem to be evidence of this, and Geoff remarked that: "...surely someone has a 'Purple Heart' which reverted back to 'Mirlo'?" My plants all have similar, well variegated pups, but we finally got evidence of a sport from Michael who wrote:

"I obtained my *Ae.* 'Mirlo' in the late 80's. The plant was nicely variegated on dark glossy foliage. As with many variegated plants a percentage of pups came with no variegation. Over the years I sold both 'Mirlo' (reverts) and 'Mirlo' variegated. Eventually I started culling the non-variegated pups and took 'Mirlo' off my list. I currently have just a pot or two of 'Mirlo' variegated but because it is unstable I don't offer it on our published list." This data is further proof that the variegated A. 'Mirlo' now called A. 'Purple Heart' is an unstable sport.

When I was informed by the respondents to my request for identification in the May issue that

my "unknown" plant was A. 'Mirlo', I checked its description(s), and I discovered for the first time that on the BCR the variegated form of A. 'Mirlo' was called A. 'Purple Heart'. At almost the same time, Geoff Lawn confirmed that: "A. 'Mirlo', variegated form with central red stripes, already has a registered name - A. 'Purple Heart'. The BCR entry photo is mine from maybe 20 years ago..... I got mine from Olive Trevor as 'Mirlo' variegated in 1985...I read that it was named 'Purple Heart' but where from? I did have a straight 'Mirlo' at the time but kept only 'Purple Heart' in the end."

I thought that the name 'Purple Heart' is misleading and not apt, as the leaf color is more mahogany-red than purple and the name implies a purple center as in a neoregelia which is not true of this plant. I would have liked to see the name changed to *Aechmea* 'Red Stripes' and Geoff agreed. After our discussions Derek prefers to keep the name 'Purple Heart'. His reservation about a change of name is that it might lead to confusion, and Michael noted that the name 'Mirlo' has been widely known for many years, and he's keeping it to avoid confusing customers. 'Purple Heart' has been listed in the BCR for many years (without our noticing it), and I am now persuaded we should keep the name.

I am among those growers who feel compelled to get correct names on the plants I grow - one of my rationales for relating this complicated saga of *Aechmea* 'Mirlo'. As Uncle Derek is wont to say: "It's all good fun". I thank all the people who wrote to me and identified my "unknown plant" as A. 'Mirlo', now called 'Purple Heart'; it provided this editor material for this issue of *Bromeliana* and the good fun of writing this article.

Many issues remain to be resolved. Perhaps some readers may inform us that they are growing the original Hummel's purple-black A. 'Mirlo'. □

MORE ON *VRIESEA SPLENDENS*

(A Supplement to the May, 2012 article)

by Herb Plevier

The positive response to the May, 2012 article on *Vriesea splendens* kept the subject in my mind. I thought about the fact that it was the first bromeliad I had purchased (from Ed Hummel) sometime in 1961. When my memory of that time became more focused, I realized I was too casual when I wrote in

the May article that the plant was the form known as 'Cayenne'. I had an epiphany and saw that plant as being very different from 'Cayenne'. Unfortunately, I did not take photos in those early days, so I needed to do some searching in my files.

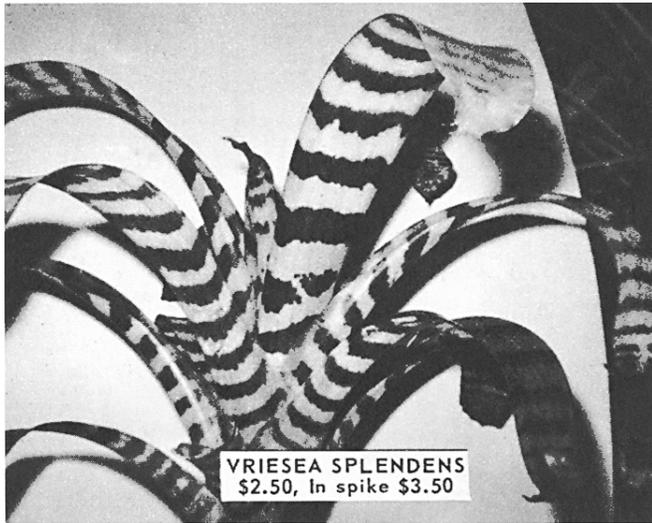
First I found a Hummel catalog that I got with

my order. Most plants in the catalog were various succulents; it listed just 12 bromeliads, but it had photos of each plant including that *Vriesea splendens*!

The photo below, scanned from Hummel's catalog, shows a form of the species unlike any of those I printed in the May, 2012 article entitled "Where Have All the *Vriesea Splendens* Gone?" I have left in the inset at the bottom of the photo for you to gasp at the prices - \$2.50 for a good-sized plant and \$3.50 for the plant in spike!



variegated *Vriesea splendens*



NEWS and NOTES

Within a few years, Hummel had an 11 page list of hundreds of bromeliads, most of them with the same incredible prices. Of special importance to this topic is Hummel's description of the form of *V. splendens* he had cultivated and was selling: "*splendens: The most demanded. Choice for foliage and flower. Leaves banded white (my emphasis) on purplish-black. Flower, the famous 'Flaming Sword'. Spike red with yellow flowers.*" Note the similarity between Hummel's form with white bands and Kent's *V. 'Vista'* which is like a miniature sized copy. (Its photo is in the May issue.)

When I looked at the catalog photo I realized that I had also failed to mention in the article the beautiful, but very costly and hard to find variegated form of *V. splendens* that once was available. My first view of that plant was at Jeffrey Kent's house in Vista, California, not long after Leonard Kent had moved his nursery down from Los Angeles.

The photograph in column 2 of a variegated *V. splendens* was taken at Jeffrey's pool in 1975.

IN MEMORIAM - It is with deepest regret that we report the death of Sara Savitt in June after a long illness. Sara served two terms each as Vice-President, President and then Director of the New York Bromeliad Society. Always active, she made important contributions to our work with her wise counsel and warm friendship. She assisted us in putting on public displays and brought beautifully grown plants to exhibit. Especially memorable was her magnificent *Quesnelia* 'Tim Plowman'. To save us the cost of room rentals, Sara graciously offered her apartment for a several membership and Board of Directors meetings.

We send our sincere condolences to Sara's husband Isaac, her two sons and their families. A memorial meeting for Sara was held on July 15th at Isaac's apartment attended by many members of our society and the Indoor Garden Society.

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