

# BROMELIANA

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## DON BEADLE - "MR. BILLGERGIA" - HAS DIED

by Herb Plever

We all mourn the loss of Don Beadle, widely known as "Mr. Billbergia", who died on October 31<sup>st</sup> at the age of 89 years. He was the great hybridizer of many beautiful Billbergia cultivars, the BSI's first Bromeliad Cultivar Registrar, a spectacular performer and entertainer at many World Bromeliad Conferences, a man with a droll and occasionally wicked wit, and an all around really nice guy you were glad to have as a friend.

He was a professional engineer, but he also was a skilled mechanic and an excellent photographer. He loved boats and being on the water, and he always had a boat he was rebuilding or tinkering with, and repairing engines and motors. By the time I met him in 1982 he was a confirmed bachelor.

He had a keen mind, and he was a very good researcher. After he was introduced to Bromeliads by his pal and neighbor, the late John Anderson, he became addicted and began collecting, growing and



Don Beadle, center, Tampa, 2017

studying every brom he could get his hands on. He soon developed his encyclopedic knowledge of the species and cultivars of the *Bromeliaceae*.

I first met Don at the 1982 World Bromeliad Conference in Corpus Christi, Texas, where Don lived. Sig Sussman and I were able to spend an afternoon with Don in his two story, 1,600 square foot wooden shade house that surfer

friends had built and attached it to his smaller house. The second story bedroom had a walkway that was attached to the shade house so Don could walk directly from the bedroom to his plants.

Don was an excellent photographer, and he made slides of every plant and its flower parts that came his way. He became active in the Corpus Christie Bromeliad Society and in the BSI. With that background, Don soon became the first Bromeliad Cultivar Registrar and during that tenure he produced in 1991 the first, comprehensive Bromeliad Cultivar

**NEXT MEETING** - **Wednesday, December 19th**, 2018 at 6:30 P.M. at the home of Michael Riley and Francisco Correal, 101 West 104<sup>th</sup> Street, corner Columbus Avenue. (Take the 7<sup>th</sup> Ave. #1 train or the Independent A, B, or C trains to 103<sup>rd</sup> St.)

**HOLIDAY PARTY!** - Once again Michael and Francisco have graciously offered to host our annual party in their beautiful home. The party is open to members and their spouses, families or significant others. Michael and Francisco will provide the main courses; please RSVP them at 212-666-2395 if you plan to attend. AND let him know if you will bring a side dish, salad, fruit or dessert. Michael has added new plants to his collection of bromeliads, orchids, aroids, ferns, etc. growing epiphytically in his living room.

Register. That monumental work was updated in 1998 with the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Bromeliad Cultivar Registers; it formed the base on which the first digital Bromeliad Cultivar Register was created by then Cultivar Registrar Derek Butcher on fcbs.org with Michael Andreas as webmaster.

(The three Bromeliad Cultivar Registers by Don Beadle also became the platform for BSI's updated BCR, with its advanced search engine that is simple to use, thanks to Bromeliad Cultivar Registrar Geoffrey Lawn, Derek Butcher and webmaster Eric Gouda.)

At some point Don became fixed on Billbergias which became the exclusive genus he collected, studied and hybridized. His work expanded exponentially after he was able to wheedle from Bob Whitman a pup of the cultivar known as *Billbergia* "Domingos Martins" - a heavily white spotted clone of *Billbergia vittata*. Don used that spotted *Billbergia* to make many beautiful cultivars.

With expanded acquisitions, Don soon ran out of room in his large Corpus Christi shade house, and while visiting Harry Luther in Florida, by chance he stumbled upon a large property on First Dirt Road in Venice, Florida and he bought it. It became the site of Don's Los Milagros nursery. At that time Billbergias were not popularly grown except for the beautiful Billbergia 'Fantasia' and B. 'Muriel Waterman made by Mulford Foster. Don took great offense at this apparent deprecation of his beloved Billbergias, and he started a campaign to popularize them.

Aided by his discovery that he could freeze and preserve pollen, Don soon had a large inventory of pollen from many different plants that he could use in hybridizing. With that pollen cache he was able to create an incredible number of new, beautiful Billbergia cultivars that ultimately numbered in all more than 140.

Michael Andreas did an outstanding job in digitizing Don's slides and photos and in maintaining the data of the many Beadle cultivars that were named and registered on fcbs.org. Mike was the keeper of the Beadle legacy for many years.

At many World Bromeliad Conferences Don was the featured performer at the Saturday night



Don Beadle and Joann Buell, Orlando 2012

banquet where he presented wonderful videos in very slow motion of Billbergias blooming with an accompanying musical sound track. You became transfixed by the innovative multimedia presentation and would be startled when he would interject droll comments warning naysayers they were going to be visited by the Billbergia monster. (Love them - or else....!)

At that time Don was a confirmed, middle aged bachelor, happy to be totally involved with creating more and more beautiful Billbergia cultivars. He loved his Billbergias, but they could not love him back. He didn't realize something was missing in his life until he met Joann Buell. Their reciprocal love was stronger than his unrequited love for Billbergias, so he sold his plants and the Los Milagros nursery on First Dirt Road in Venice, FL to Michael Kiehl. He rebuilt yet another big boat, and he and Joann sailed off into the sunset on the Mississippi River.

They spent some happy years sailing, but sometime in 2011 he began to get antsy so Joann and Don wisely went back on shore to his Billbergias at Michael Kiehl's nursery on First Dirt Road in Venice, FL. Without charge, Michael graciously provided Don with facilities at his now huge nursery where Don could study, hybridize and photograph new Billbergia cultivars - and many new ones were created by Don.

Michael Kiehl is now justly the keeper of Don's plants, slides, notes, pollen and a number of unnamed and unregistered cultivars. We hope and expect that these will soon be registered on our BCR.

Don's repeated and constant experimentation led him to develop a "nose" and deep intuition for what plants to cross. Without doubt the most popularly grown cultivar is *Billbergia* 'Hallelujah' (B. 'Domingos Martins' x B. 'Ed Mcwilliams'), a pot of which is shown at the top of page 3. (The plants were grown by Don and he took the photo.)

Note the compactness of the three plants with many white spots. The leaves all have bright, lively magenta/pink coloration mixed some dark brown outer leaves. Growers are cautioned that this plant requires bright light to acquire compactness and bright magenta/pink highlights. If grown in lesser



*Billbergia* 'Hallelujah' (*B.* 'Domingos Martins' x *B.* 'Ed McWilliams'), photo by Don Beadle, fcbs.org



*Billbergia* 'Domingos Martins'



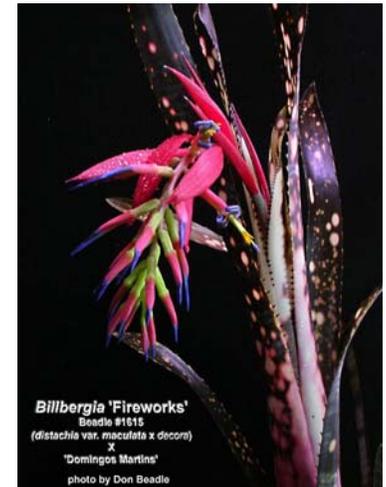
*Billbergia* 'Brimstone' (*B.* 'Beryl Allen' x *euphemii* v. *purpurea*) photo by Don Beadle, fcbs



*Billbergia* 'Bayou Sunset' (*B.* {( ' RL Frasier x *B.* 'Afterglow') x *B.* 'Estrella'}) photo by Don Beadle



*Billbergia* 'Beadleman' (*B.* 'Domingos Martins' x '*B.* 'Hellfire') photo by Beadle



*Billbergia* 'Fireworks' (*B. distachia* v. *maculata* x 'Domingos Martins') photo by Don Beadle

light *B.* 'Hallelujah' will grow taller with a kind of dull, dark brown/magenta color.

I've selected only a few photos from the huge catalog of Beadle cultivars. I am partial to those plants with strong red leaves and to inflorescences with blue-petaled flowers and bright red bracts. Over the years I have bloomed and photographed many of

Don's Billbergias.

These are some of my very favorite cultivars: *Billbergias* 'Aribella', 'Bayou Sunset', 'Beadleman', 'Cherry Cordial', 'Con Gusto', 'Dippin Dots', 'Don's Purple Haze', 'El Gitano', 'Fireworks', 'Full Moon', 'La Noche', 'Luna Blanca', 'Nita' and 'Tequilla Sunset'. □

## ON SEEING RED

by Herb Plever

(This still pertinent article is reprinted from the January 2001 issue of Bromeliana.)

This is an updated, current view of an article I wrote in the January, 2001 Bromeliana, with more precise, scientific descriptions of the pollination processes. The topic of that month's meeting 18 years ago: "Seeing Red", had nothing to do with the ordinary meaning of being angry. On the contrary, we seem to be strongly attracted to plants with red bracts and/or petals. But we are not the only creatures who

react to color. In fact, color (and odor) are among the main evolutionary strategies developed by plants to attract pollinators such as birds, bees, ants, flies, beetles, butterflies etc. In their day-long (or night-long in the case of moths) search for food, these pollinators are attracted to color, color patterns and/or odor from plant bracts and flowers.

The seeds in Bromelioid species are contained

in berry-like fruits with colors that range from red through orange, yellow, violet and ultraviolet on inflorescences with scape bracts that are usually of bright red, orange, yellow and violet - and ultraviolet. Some fruits start out with a milky white color, and they turn color when they become fertile after they have been pollinated.

Ultraviolet color is invisible to human eyes, but it is visible to birds who can see it and are attracted to all the colors from red through ultraviolet. The berry fruits have waxy coatings that reflect UV light, making them stand out vibrantly against green foliage. Birds can see this fruit more clearly than humans, making foraging much easier. The seeds in many species are self-pollinated, but some are pollinated by bees and other insects who also can see ultraviolet light.

Birds are attracted to the highly colored scape bracts, and then they forage on the berry-like fruits. But the hard, waxy coating on the berries prevents them from breaking down in the birds' digestive systems; the berries pass through the digestive system intact, and they are dispersed in the bird plop when it is deposited on a tree branch. Then the seeds will germinate and grow in the rich nutrients of the bird plop.

Species in the other sub-families produce seeds in pods. Tillandsioid pods are dehiscent - that is they explode when the seeds are ready. The seeds have feathery-like plumes on their tails which act like parachutes, and the seeds are shot into the air where they can float on air currents and are dispersed a great distance from the mother plant. When insect pollinators find those plants to be a good source of nectar, imprinting of the experience occurs and then bio-chemical triggers will continue to draw them to those plants. The strategy also guarantees continuous pollination of the bromeliad ovaries.

On the color spectrum humans can see from red to violet (but not ultraviolet). Insect pollinators cannot see red, but they can see spectral color from yellow to ultraviolet, and what we think of as a putrid odor they may smell as perfume, and visa versa. If different pollinators are attracted to different colors, over the eons those plants with the "right" color for pollinators in their area will selectively thrive over those plants whose colors are unattractive to them.

Microorganisms such as different yeasts can change the taste of the nectar, so their effect is also a

factor that determines what pollinators will pollinate what plant.

But back to our 'Seeing Red'. Rachel Carson, wrote 'Silent Spring' in 1962, and she explained how indiscriminate application of agricultural chemicals, pesticides, and other modern chemicals polluted our streams, damaged bird and animal populations, and caused severe medical problems for humans.

All life on our planet from its beginning to today has been shaped by Natural Selection in its exquisite dialectical relationship with chance (chaos). But Natural Selection has been overwhelmed by the explosion of uncontrolled industrialization with concomitant overuse of fossil fuels and nitrogen-based fertilizers that has brought pollution to our rivers and water and the destruction of our forests, oceans and rivers, air, natural resources and all of the creatures of the earth as well the loss of human values.

For at least 40 years 99% of all scientists have agreed that climate change was man-made; they warned that continued use of fossil fuels for energy will produced large quantities of greenhouse gases that will increasingly warm our oceans and land, change our climate, destroy plant and animal life and create monstrous hurricanes, tornados, tsunamis.

This has in fact already happened and it is happening with increased frequency and severity; still most people are passively accepting it. There is little support from the population for alternative, safe means to produce energy. It is hard to down the suspicion that *homo sapiens* may be evolving into *homo ignorans*. This is an indictment of an oligarchy that owns about 45% of the productive wealth of the U.S. They own the fossil fuel industries of oil, coal and wood and they continue to burn fossil fuels and produce greenhouse gases with actual knowledge of the deleterious effects on our lives. Their giant corporations finance and control most of the political leaders and legislators of the U.S. and the industrial corporations of other countries. They own and control all means of communication such as television, radio, newspapers internet blobs. The result is a dumbed-down population that passively accepts the deplorable destruction of their environments and damage to their health. Deregulation of the environmental safety rules by the President exacerbates the risks of destruction of our environment and way of life, and I'm seeing red.

Thousands of acres of tropical forests (the major source of our oxygen) are burned or cut down every day, the holes in our protective ozone layer are getting even larger, our seas are warming and rising, the polar caps and glaciers have almost melted, our water and air are polluted and species are dying and disappearing.

A front page article in the NY Times of November 24<sup>th</sup> reported the prediction in a scientific

report issued by 13 federal agencies that: “if significant steps are not taken to rein in global warming, the damage will knock off as much as 10% off the size of the American economy by the century’s end...its findings are directly at odds with President Trump’s agenda of deregulation...” He encourages the use of fossil fuels and disparages and scoffs at the science that shows the release of greenhouse gases is dangerously warming the planet, and I’m seeing red.

I am indebted to Robert Meyer, editor of the BromeliAdvisory, the newsletter of the Bromeliad Society of South Florida, for the sad news of the deaths of Chet Blackburn and Maureen Frazel - and for information about these long-time friends.

**CHET BLACKBURN**, former editor of the Bromeliad Journal, died on September 15<sup>th</sup> at the age of 85 years. Chet was interested in plants as a teenager. When he completed military service he settled in Auburn, California where he cultivated thousands of different plants on a huge 8-acre garden. He was especially interested in bromeliads and native plants. Chet joined the Bromeliad Society in 1976, and he was one of the cofounders of the Sacramento Bromeliad Society in which he was a leader for many years. He grew an incredible 1500 or more bromeliads and thus acquired unique horticultural expertise, and he became the go-to person for information about growing broms. *Vriesea blackburniana* was named after Chet. He always continued his interest in native plants and put on annual Live Wildflower exhibits.

I first met Chet at a World Bromeliad Conference (1980 or 1982) and we became friends and pen pals. (We didn’t have email then.) He maintained a mischievous sense of humor despite family tragedy and it was fun to be with him. He served as editor of the Journal of the Bromeliad Society for six years from 1996-2002. During that period, Chet undertook the labor intensive job of making an Index of all the Bromeliad Society Bulletins and Journals from 1950 to 1996 and he completed it. He was the first (and last) person to have taken that initiative, and we sure can use someone to bring that Index up to date. Any volunteers?

In the January 2003 issue of Bromeliana, I

wrote: “We express our appreciation to outgoing Journal editor, Chet Blackburn, who creditably performed that thankless, yeoman job despite family problems.”

**MAUREEN FRAZEL**, one of the cofounders of the Broward County Bromeliad Society, died on October 12<sup>th</sup> at the age of 88 years. She and her husband Bill were active leaders of that affiliate for many years. Professionally, Maureen was a skilled histologist and she was also very knowledgeable about growing bromeliads. Her valuable input and friendship will certainly be missed.

N E W S and N O T E S

**2019 DUES** are due and payable on January 1st. Single and joint memberships are \$25.00. Please pay your dues at the Holiday Party or mail your check payable to N.Y. Bromeliad Society to Barbara Lagow, 54 West 74th Street, #603, N.Y.C. 10023.

**MEETINGS** - Please note in your calendars that there will be no meetings in January and February. This decision was taken because expected bad weather in those months curtails attendance.

<p><b><u>OFFICERS</u></b>          President.....Ben Katz          Treasurer.....Barbara Lagow          Editor.....Herb Plever</p>	<p><b><u>DIRECTORS</u></b>          Victoria Ehrlich</p>
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