



Newsletter of the

# *Hawai'i Bromeliad Society*

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JULY 2018

## **WELCOMING LYON ARBORETUM DIRECTOR RAKAN ZAHAWI**

We are very pleased to announce that Rakan Zahawi, who was appointed director of Lyon Arboretum on October 1, 2017, will be the guest speaker at our July meeting. A tropical ecologist specializing in restoration ecology and the recovery of degraded habitats, Dr. Zahawi has worked extensively in Central America, primarily in Costa Rica and Honduras, and on a large-scale restoration project in Colombia. He received a bachelor of science in botany from the University of Texas at Austin and his doctorate in plant biology from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Committed to putting research into practice to promote conservation, for the past eleven years Dr. Zahawi has served as director of the Duke University Organization for Tropical Studies Las Cruces Biological Station and the Wilson Botanical Garden in southern Costa Rica, an active research, educational, and community-resource facility (sounds a lot like Lyon Arboretum!), while also serving as a Resarcher in the Environmental Studies Department at the University of California, Santa Cruz. His research focuses primarily on evaluating methods to enable or speed up tropical forest recovery in degraded habitats. He has conducted both observational and experimental research, through large- and small-scale projects that reveal a commitment not only to furthering scientific advancement, but to applying his research to support conservation goals in his own community. He has coauthored more than forty scientific publications, and last year, he and his primary research collaborator, Karen Holl, from the University of California, Santa Cruz, received the 2017 Society for Ecological Restoration Theodore M. Sperry Award, a biannual prize given to scientists who have made significant and enduring contributions to restoration science and practice.

When Dr. Zahawi was hired, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa Vice Chancellor for Research Michael Bruno observed that "His numerous accomplishments and experiences across a wide range of global locations and missions make him uniquely qualified to lead the arboretum," as it embarks on its second hundred years of research, education, and service. Dr. Zahawi has already overseen the completion and opening of the new Micropropogation Lab, and a number of successful public events. Just a couple of weeks ago, he hosted a special visit from Prince and Princess Akishino of Japan, who were visiting O'ahu to commemorate the arrival of the first Japanese immigrants to Hawai'i, but who took time out from their official duties to visit Lyon Arboretum for a tour, walking the grounds for over an hour—including past the Bromeliad Garden. (Good thing we've been working overtime to make it presentable!)

In addition to the Centennial Ho'olaule'a that will be held at the Arboretum on August 4, upcoming public events include a two-day conference to be held at the East-West Center on September 13–14, where over forty speakers will discuss a range of topics tied to the history and cultural significance of Lyon Arboretum and its collections, as well as to the variety and value of scientific work conducted here.

Dr. Zahawi will be speaking to us both about his personal journey to the Arboretum, and his plans for the facility.

### 2018 OFFICERS OF THE HAWAI'I BROMELIAD SOCIETY

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## **JULY MEETING**

This Saturday, July 28,  
we meet at **Lyon Arboretum**  
at **12:30.**

Our hospitality hosts are  
**Mischa and Brian.**

## REPORT OF THE MEETING OF JUNE 30, 2018

Lyon Arboretum

ATTENDING: Susan Andrade, Dina Chuensanguansat, Merrill Cutting, David Fell, Naty Hopewell, Gail Ishihara, John Ishihara, Wes Kobayashi, Terese Leber (presiding), Wendie Liu, Larry McGraw, Sally Mist, Leslie Morishige, Karen Rohter, Dolores Roldan, Jaime Roldan, Stanley Schab, Lynette Wageman, Randy Wong, Val Wong. GUEST: Aziz, Chris, Christina, Jerry, Kanoa, Sylvia.

CONVENED: 12:40; ADJOURNED: 2:45.

Terese welcomed everyone, with thanks to Wendie and Leslie for food and drinks, and especially to Gail for inviting and hosting our guest speaker.

Lynette (thanks for reminding us!) congratulated Gail and John on their third anniversary.

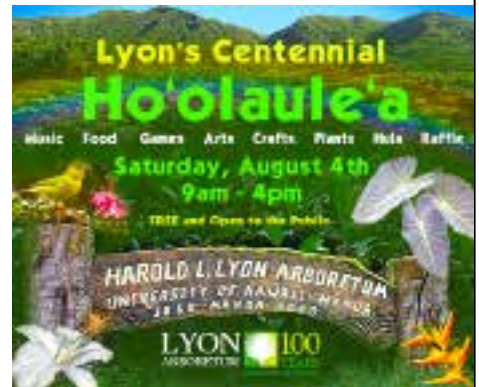
TREASURER: Dolores reported that we made \$184 at the May auction, and that our current bank balance is \$12,743.86. Outstanding expenses include reimbursing Lynette \$60 for renewing our membership in the Cryptanthus Society, which comes with a two-year subscription to their journal (available from the HBS library).

LIBRARY: David offered his backlog of issues of the *Journal of the Bromeliad Society* to HBS; Merrill will crosscheck the library holdings with his issues.

HOSPITALITY: Our hospitality hosts for July are Mischa and Brian.

OLD BUSINESS—COCONUT CHUNKS: Terese surveyed members to see how many would like to purchase coconut chunks to use as a planting medium. The bricks generally cost \$16 to \$17 in a store such as Koolau Farmers, but David has generously agreed to offer blocks of the chunks to members, from his own supply, at a greatly reduced price. He explained how the properties of the coconut chunks—the ability to retain water while allowing for air circulation, to hold plants firmly, and to last a long time before breaking down—create a great medium for planting bromeliads. Members decided to purchase three four-brick blocks.

NEW BUSINESS—LYON CENTENNIAL: Terese noted that Lyon Arboretum will be hosting a Ho'olaule'a in honor of its centennial. Aziz, who is part of the event planning group, explained that the celebration will feature a plant sale, a silent auction, live entertainment, food trucks, hula performances, arts and crafts and education booths, exhibits, tree climbing demonstrations, tours of the gardens, and a special KidZone. The event will take place on Saturday, August 4th,



from 9 am to 4 pm. The Arboretum is looking for volunteers to help with all facets of the celebration, as

well as with setting up for the event on Friday. Terese explained how to sign up to volunteer. In response to a question from Larry, Aziz noted that vendor tables cost \$25; Terese will consult with Lynette and Gail, and Arboretum staff, about HBS hosting a table at the event.

AUCTION: Our June auction, in keeping with the theme of our guest speaker, featured a variety of *Tillandsia*, including specimens of *brachycaulos*, *neglecta*, *rothii*, *streptophylla*, and *stricta*, a *juncea* with six keiki and a seed pod, and the—for us—less common varieties of *magnusiana* and *velutina*.

Larry, with a descendant of a *Tillandsia Jalisco-monticola* that he acquired decades ago south of Puerto Vallarta; he explained why it has proven to be a good plant for him to hybridize.

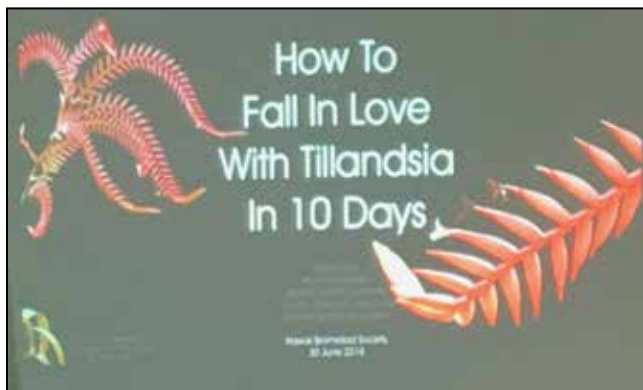


## HOW TO FALL IN LOVE WITH *TILLANDSIA*

HBS members and guests at our June meeting were privileged to experience a captivating and informative presentation by Martin Siaw—Singapore-born and currently based in the People’s Republic of China, but on a mission to share his love of bromeliads—especially *Tillandsia*—with people around the world. Thanks to the invitation and hospitality of Gail and John Ishihara, Martin was persuaded to stop in Hawai‘i and discuss with us his activities and plans for spreading the understanding and appreciation of bromeliads throughout China.

In her introduction, Gail explained how they met Martin at the recent Bromeliad Society International World Bromeliad Conference in San Diego, where his compelling story captured their imagination, impressing them so much that they invited him to stop in Honolulu on his way to New York—which he did, but only after jetting back to China for just eighteen hours for a presentation!

As for the bare facts, Martin is a Ph.D. candidate at Beijing Forestry University, where he is working on conservation strategies for tropical plants, in particular the native begonia. He brings to bromeliads a lifelong love of plants. The developer of the International Malus Registration site on crab apples, he has published on plumeria and wild begonia, and researched varieties of fern and cactus. But then, one day he encountered a *Tillandsia bulbosa*—the “craziest plant” he had ever seen—and was captivated.



In his presentation “How to Fall in Love with Tillandsia in 10 Days,” Martin focused on “What I Am and What I Do.” He revealed how the different facets of his wide-ranging experience have contributed to his projects for promoting *Tillandsia*, while also allowing him to advance his commitment to serving underprivileged individuals and groups in China. One of his earlier enterprises, the Happy People Group, took on all kinds of odd jobs that involved stories of transformation, ranging from the rebranding of restaurants to the promotion of super models, and he has since applied those same skills to changing attitudes in China toward *Tillandsia*.

Since founding Inca Garden in 2014 Martin has focused on designing and curating themed horticultural exhibitions, while providing jobs and training in plant care and cultivation and interior landscape and floral design services. By promoting the popularity and appreciation of *Tillandsia*, Martin also shows his employees that their work has value. He found his main challenge to be the dismissive attitude prevalent in China toward *Tillandsia*, and bromeliads in general. Although there is a record of pineapple cultivation in China as early as 1605, before 1979 only about ten species of bromeliads could be found in botanical gardens. But now, hundreds of species flourish in the 168 registered botanical gardens in China, especially those in Shanghai and Xiamen, and thousands of people have attended the events Martin has staged in venues including Chengdu, Deng Hui, Shanghai, and Singapore. For one of his early exhibitions, he had expected several hundred attendees over the course of the event, and 32,000 came.

In his talk, Martin focused on what has led to this shift in perception in China, and the strategies he is using to make broad groups of people aware of and interested in *Tillandsia*. His first step is to pray: to ask for wisdom and guidance. He seeks out experts, and is anxious to learn from experienced growers and sellers. He acknowledges advice from John Arden,

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# PROMOTING BROMELIAD CULTIVATION AND APPRECIATION IN CHINA

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Jerry Robinson of Rainforest Flora, Pamela Koide Hyatt of Bird Rock Tropicals, and Mark Dimmitt, among others, and while here, with the help of Gail and John, he had the opportunity to talk with David Fell, Jerry Domingo, Larry McGraw, David Shiigi, Dennis Hastert, and other growers.

Martin's principal strategy for promoting bromeliads is to go beyond plant enthusiasts to "reach the brown-thumbers." This can involve highlighting a plant's flower, foliage, fruit, or fragrance. With *Tillandsia* in particular, a good promotional point is their ease of growth: they can be popularized as a "lazy gardener's plant" that will grow just about anywhere, that doesn't need complicated growing media or expensive pots, or lots of care or tending—an ideal plant for an obsessive compulsive, one that will take care of itself! A *Tillandsia* grower can have a friend for life; just stick it in the garden and you can wind up with an heirloom—a plant that will last for generations, and that because of its structure, can be considered plant art. The theory behind these strategies is to create an emotional identification with the plant; *Tillandsia*, for example, can be presented as a mom's BFF—giving everything to its keiki and then dying.



Martin deliberately designs exhibits that are accessible to everyone, putting on a show, for example, in a dark room, where the visitor's experience is tactile. He uses niche marketing: shows where animals are allowed, or shows specifically designed for schoolchildren. He tries to collaborate with as many different interest groups as possible, combining a plant exhibition, for instance, with a furniture show, to help people visualize how the plants will look in their homes, and holding exhibits in nontraditional spaces, such as restaurants and art museums. And he harnesses the power of all media formats, traditional and modern, to promote his events. Finally, his own work earning advanced degrees and publishing research, lends credibility to his projects, making them more useful to scientists and collectors.

Martin has already started to see *Tillandsia* gain in mass appeal across China. Future projects? He is currently exploring with various government ministries the possibility of hosting the 2020 World Bromeliad Conference in Xiamen, and creating his most ambitious project to date, "The Inspired Garden," for the Science and Technology Museum in Beijing.

