

At our annual Holiday Party and Potluck in December, attendees socialized while enjoying sweet and savory treats brought in by fellow members, perused the Give-Away Table and contemplated early holiday shopping from assorted vendors. Social hour was followed by an entertaining slide show presented by Kathy Musial and Steve Gerischer about the two back-to-back trips the Pacific Horticulture Society (PHS) booked to Madagascar in October 2012, as each of them had escorted one of the tours. Although plants from this botanically-rich island nation featured prominently in their show, it was their personal observations that kept the program on a light note to match the casual mood of the evening.

Kathy is Curator of Living Collections at the Huntington Library and Gardens, has travelled extensively with the PHS, and was able to showcase both her horticultural knowledge as well as her travel expertise in her talk. Steve is currently president of both the SCHS and the PHS, and while he also enjoys seeking out botanical adventures worldwide, his travelogue was enhanced by more anecdotal observations. As Kathy travelled with the first of the tours, she began the evening's presentation.

She gave us a brief history of Madagascar, wherein we learned that after its prehistoric geological split from both the African continent and the Indian peninsula, the island's native plants and animals evolved in relative isolation and 90% are endemic to the island. While this makes Madagascar a global biodiversity hotspot, its increasing population as well as political and socioeconomic factors contribute to ongoing habitat destruction, which continues to increase at a rapid rate. Ecotourism and other diversionary measures are helping to slow the destruction of some ecosystems, but the future of many more is still uncertain.

One of the highlights of Kathy's trip was a visit to the world famous Avenue of the Baobabs, featuring six species found only in Madagascar. They are the remnants of a once-dense forest, and while extremely popular, they are located in a completely unprotected area. From there, the trip continued at

Andasibe-Mantadia National Park, where Kathy saw both *Asplenium nidus* and *Rhipsalis baccifera*. This leg of the tour also included a nighttime walk to more easily spot some of the many indigenous chameleons found on the island.

Kathy explained that with most excursions originating from the capital city of Antananarivo, frequent trips in and out of that city were necessary in order to get to any destination. This was the case for the tour's next stop at Berenty Reserve, which could only be accessed by first flying in, and then driving along a bumpy road. It is home to the world-renowned Spiny Forest although the forest itself is surrounded by a sisal plantation. From there she visited Andohahela National Park, home of ring-tailed lemurs and plants including *Uncarina decaryi*, 8 foot tall *Kalanchoe beharensis* and *Dypsis decaryi*. The last tour stop for her group was Isalo National Park, where the group hiked to the Jurassic rock formation known as Fenetre de L'Isalo while admiring big ladybugs and *Pachypodium rosulatum* along the way.

At this point, Kathy shared how tenuous air travel in and out of the country can be. Upon her group's return trip, during a fuel stop in Marseilles, they experienced a delay of several hours because Air Madagascar had not paid their fuel bill. While they were eventually transferred to another plane, the incident unfortunately impacted Steve's arrival, as the original plane was the one scheduled to bring his group into Madagascar! This created a ripple effect for his group, with late arrival times at every destination that caused much rescheduling.

While Steve's tour eventually made it to the same locations, his group was a lot less happy about travelling in the heat and humidity knowing they would probably get "bumped" at most of their stops. Steve shared photos of many plants, including *Angraecum* orchids, *Catharanthus roseus*, *Ravenala*



Photo: Pacific Horticulture Society

madagascariensis and various *Uncarina*. He talked about the many indigenous animals he saw on the trip, including the crested drongo bird, the Madagascar flycatcher, the leaf-tailed gecko and the Madagascar golden orb spider. He also showed pictures of rice fields found throughout the country (which are used to make bricks when the soil has been over-farmed), the city of Antananarivo seen through a smoke haze created by forests being cut down to make charcoal, and zebu oxen, the working animals that are only eaten when they die. He also showed some of the gardening tools that tour participants purchased and which required explanations for being in their luggage while going through the airports. Fortunately, his group made it back without further incident.

After the presentation, Kathy and Steve answered some audience questions and then members were given a chance to make some last-minute purchases, as well as converge at the ever-popular Give-Away Table. After a signal from Steve Gerischer, members grabbed the prizes they had been eyeing all evening, and the last meeting of 2016 was over.

☞ Sabine Steinmetz

UP-DATED U.C. WARNING
HUANGLONGBING aka CITRUS PSYLLID

Posted January 4, 2017

News Release from the Citrus Pest and Disease Prevention Program

An intensive risk survey in Cerritos, Los Angeles County, resulted in the discovery of Huanglongbing in a single orange tree. California Department of Food and Agriculture staff began the survey after a sample of Asian citrus psyllids from the area was found to be positive for the bacteria that causes HLB.

Link to full story can be found at:

ucanr.edu/blogs/blogcore/postdetail.cfm?postnum=22897

SHARING SECRETS
RESPONSES

What are your gardening resolutions for the coming new year?

The same as last year - and the year before that! Don't bring home any more plants that I don't know where they will go in the garden, or have time to plant right away, only to have half of them live and die in nursery cans...

Old habits are hard to break, but new lessons can be learned - I almost never go to nurseries or plant sales alone unless I'm shopping for a client, and if I go "for fun" with

someone else, I try to remember to leave the credit cards at home.

Right now I can (proudly?) say I only have 1 flat and 7 cans left over from 2016 that need to go in the ground and I already know where they are going to live. Now I just need to make the time to plant them - but that's a another resolution.

- Sabine Steinmetz

I plan to spend more leisure time in my garden, rather than just "enjoying" it while I'm working in it!

- Anonymous

A FEW SUGGESTIONS FOR 2017

- install a rain barrel (or several)
- finally start that compost bin / pile
- invite some wildlife into your garden
- don't let those weeds go to seed this year!
- take better care of your tools
- read some of those gardening books you've been hoarding - or donate them -
- make visiting a local public garden part of your monthly schedule - equal parts therapy and inspiration
- make a plan and stick to it - your progress will be your encouragement to keep going

If nothing else, resolve to spend more time appreciating your garden just as it is. ☞