

THE LEAFLET

The Monthly Magazine of the Vallarta Botanical Garden

May 2017



JARDIN BOTANICO
VALLARTA

THE LEAFLET



The Monthly Magazine of the Vallarta Botanical Garden
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Vallarta Conservatory of Orchids
and Native Plants
Photo: Paco Ojeda
www.paco-ojeda.com



www.vbgardens.org

Curator's Corner

Dear Friends of the Garden,

The creation, development, and maintenance of a world-class botanical garden requires the hard work of an enormous team of staff and volunteers. Coordination of these activities requires great leadership, vision, and dedication from its board and managers. The Vallarta Botanical Garden has benefited tremendously from the work of our Executive Director, Neil Gerlowski, for nearly seven years. His contributions to the field of public horticulture have been recognized by Longwood Gardens, of Kennett Square, Pennsylvania who have accepted him for their prestigious Longwood Fellowship, a 13 month immersive learning experience focused on public garden management which he will begin in early June.

Neil's last day at the Vallarta Botanical Garden before leaving for the Longwood Gardens Fellowship is Friday, May 19th. We invite you to join us in wishing him well as he departs for his studies.

Neil's time away from the Vallarta Botanical Garden will mostly be treated as a sabbatical, yet he will continue with some duties from afar including editing and coordination of *El Papelillo / The Leaflet*. Producing a monthly magazine of this quality requires a whole team of contributors and will require even more while Neil is away. We invite the entire Vallarta community and our visitors to contribute content to the magazine: photos, articles, art, poetry... your imagination is the only limit! Magazine content can be sent to editor@vbgardens.org. With the active involvement of our community we can continue developing this publication that so many have grown to love and enjoy.

Warmest regards,

Bob Price, Founder and Curator, VBG



Passerina ciris, Tagetes spp., & Agave tequiliana
Photo: Jesús Reyes



Quercus bromodegeei
Photo: Antonio González

Save the Oaks — *Quercus brandegeei*

By: Neil Gerlowski, Executive Director, VBG

On a planet with 7.5 billion people competing for limited resources and contributing to a rapidly changing climate, we're collectively responsible for the greatest mass extinction since an enormous asteroid hit the earth about 66 million years ago. Animals at the brink of extinction often receive the most attention, but it is also estimated that of approximately 400,000 plant species on the planet, roughly 20% (80,000) are also under a similar threat.* In most of these cases, we don't yet have sufficient data to even properly measure the threat level or offer ideas to protect these plants. This is some seriously tough news to digest, but on the positive side, there's no shortage of things we can do to curb this loss and improve the future through purposeful action.

In 2007, researchers studying *Quercus brandegeei*, a species of oak endemic to southern Baja California, noticed that none of the populations they visited showed evidence of regeneration. Like clusters of elderly dinosaurs with no children of their own to survive them, they clearly stood out as candidates for further study and intervention. Through a collaboration between The Morton Arboretum, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), University of Minnesota, and the Vallarta Botanical Garden (VBG) as part of a Global Trees Campaign Project, and thanks in part to funding from the Mohamed Bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund and the Franklinia

Foundation, we're now part of an effort to help ensure the future of this species.

In late March I met with researchers Audrey Denvir of The Morton Arboretum and Dr. Antonio González of the UNAM to visit most of the known populations of *Q. brandegeei* and discover a few more. We took a series of careful measurements and collected samples in areas where our permits allowed. We also met with representatives of the regional offices of Mexico's federal commissions of protected natural areas (CONANP) and forestry (CONAFOR) regarding our current and upcoming work. The other expert advice we sought out was from ranchers who live and work near populations of *Q. brandegeei* who were able to help us learn more about this tree and its interactions within its natural ecosystem and the livestock that now covers most of its range. Heavy grazing of *Q. brandegeei*'s natural habitat by cattle, sheep, goats, and pigs—all of which have been introduced within the past few hundred years—could be impacting this species' ability to germinate and establish new seedlings. We also think that a drying climate, caused by long-term climate change, is a factor inhibiting regeneration.

One very hopeful observation was of a population of *Q. brandegeei* within a part of the Sierra de la Laguna harboring several sizable saplings, a few measuring over two meters in height. DNA analysis will determine whether these are indeed genetically distinct offspring or adventitious shoots (clones) of the nearby mature trees.

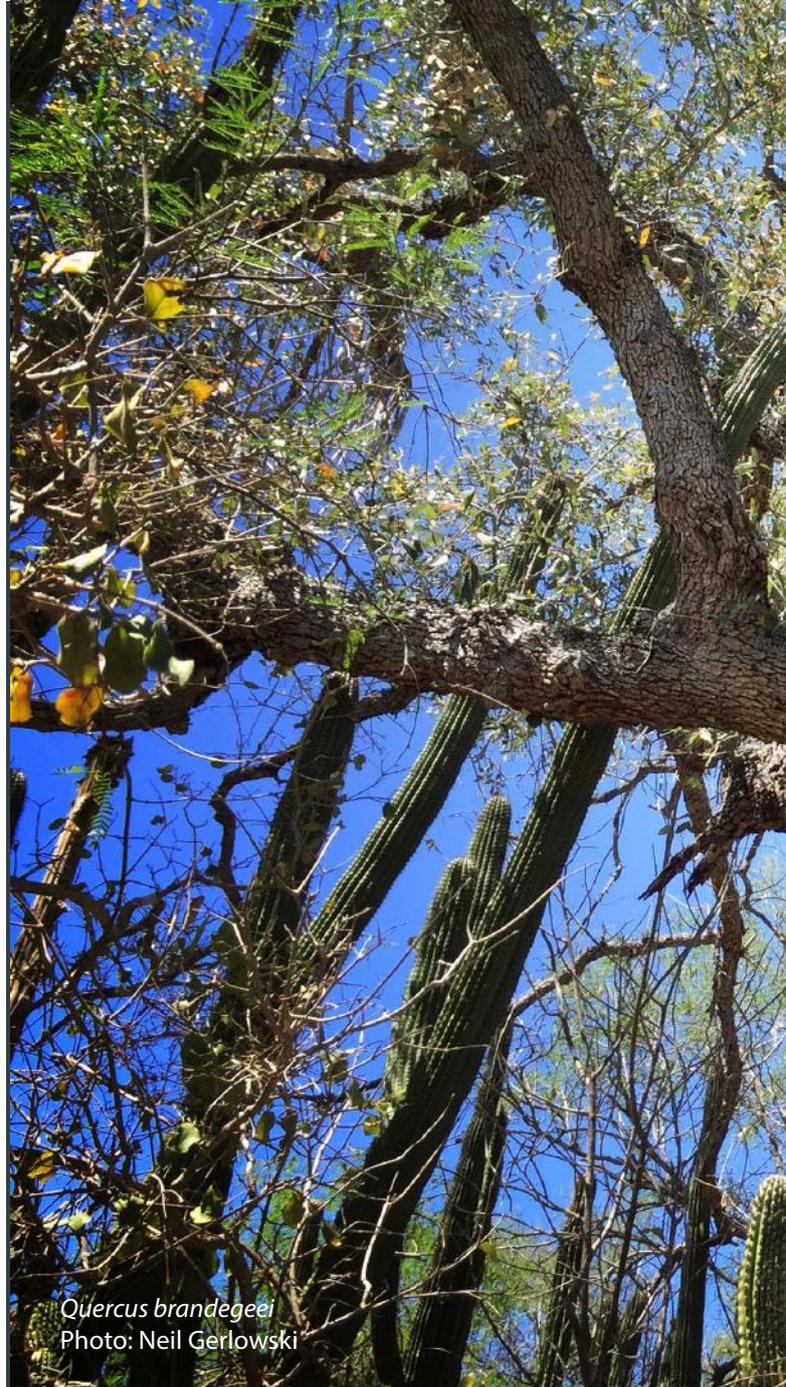
* Botanic Gardens Conservation International:
www.bgci.org/policy/1521

Researchers: Audrey Denvir, Neil Gerlowski,
& Dr. Antonio González
Photo: Antonio González



Either way though, it's incredibly reassuring to those concerned about this species' future. Another positive sign is that most of the trees we visited were full of flowers, many of which were already releasing pollen. We also saw plenty of fresh acorn caps on the branches that were still moist, flexible, and green—evidence of a very recent crop of acorns. On the first day of the expedition we even found a solitary immature acorn still hanging from a branch!

Later this year, perhaps November or December, we'll return to collect acorns to grow at the Vallarta Botanical Garden and the botanical garden of the Morelia campus of the UNAM. We'll experiment with our propagation techniques to determine the best possible cultivation scenarios. Afterward, we'll plant the seedlings in public areas of our gardens for visitors to experience and we'll offer seedlings to other Mexican botanical gardens to grow as well. These will collectively form a genetically diverse backup to the vulnerable wild populations in southern Baja. We'll then share our data through PlantSearch, a tool of Botanic Gardens Conservation International to connect our collections to researchers and conservationists worldwide. One plant at a time, we can help preserve the biodiversity that keeps our natural world healthy, resilient, fruitful, and so incredibly enjoyable.



Quercus brandegeei
Photo: Neil Gerlowski





The Leatherback is Back

By: Alejandro Sánchez Martínez, Biologist, Sea Turtle Conservation Program, CEMBAB A.C.

With a size and weight closer to that of a Volkswagen bug than what we currently think of as “turtle-size,” the leatherback (*Dermochelys coriacea*) is the largest turtle in the world with reports of individual specimens weighing in at over a ton. It’s also the most hydrodynamic turtle in the world allowing for its super migrations of over 8,000 miles (13,000 km). It also dives deeper than any other turtle and can stay down for nearly an hour and a half.

But why all of this about giant sea turtles in a botanical magazine? The Eastern Pacific subpopulation, which includes the Puerto Vallarta region, is among the most endangered with a decline of 90% in the last 30 years. But now is not the time to give up hope! This past January 19th, my amigo Antonio Ramírez saw enormous turtle tracks on the beach near the Ameca River. He knew right away that these weren’t left by our commonly encountered Olive Ridley (*Lepidochelys olivacea*), but rather a rare leatherback. He spread word for a course of

action that on March 28th permitted me and a group of researchers, volunteers, and onlookers to participate in the first release of these turtles in the bay in 8 years! That evening, 49 tiny young turtles swam out into the sunset to begin their journeys that can, with lots of luck, continue for over 100 years.

With the huge impact on our beaches from tourism activities and a growing city, leaving eggs on their own is too likely to end tragically, so turtle volunteers provide a vital service in egg relocation, monitoring, and hatchling release. We also help educate the local and visiting public about the importance of protecting these species.

While threats such as beach “development” and the “bycatch” of enormous fishing vessels are beyond the ability of most individuals to take on themselves, there are a few important things that each of us can do to help protect sea turtles. High on the list is for us to properly



Dermochelys coriacea
Foto: Petr Myska

dispose of our trash. Floating plastic, especially plastic bags, look much too similar to jellyfish, the favorite food of many sea turtles, especially the leatherback. So let's clean up better after ourselves. It's not only good manners; it can save lives.

My team at CEMBAB A.C. along with our friends at Red Tortuguera A.C. were thrilled to work with each other and our volunteers in a historic liberation of the fascinating leatherback turtle. We find a common bond with our friends at the Vallarta Botanical Garden and other groups throughout the bay and beyond who work for conservation of our planet's species and the care of our world's environment. From the peaks of our forested mountains to the deepest waters of our bay, the Puerto Vallarta region is the happy home to vast treasures of biodiversity. Together we can work to preserve this biodiversity and enjoy life on a healthy, happy planet.



CEMBAB

Conservación
de Especies
Maravillosas
de Bahía de
Banderas
A.C.

Dermochelys coriacea
Foto: Petr Myska



Mexican Bird of the Month: Yellow-headed Parrot (*Amazona oratrix*) The Emptying of Mexican Skies

Article and photo by: Greg R. Homel

www.birdinginpuertovallarta.com/birdingadventures@mac.com

Vallarta residents and visitors alike are lucky to be living or vacationing in such a biodiverse and beautiful region. The mountains surrounding our city still harbor vast tracks of largely intact tropical dry forests, pine-oak woodlands, and even cloud forests. Within these forests, keystone species such as the majestic Jaguar and Military Macaw still prowl and soar—unbeknownst to the vast majority of beach and party-goers, some just a few hundred meters away. But did you know that in the relatively recent past, just before the turn of the last century, lively flocks of Yellow-headed Parrots (*Amazona oratrix*) and stately King Vultures (*Sarcoramphus papa*) also roved over our local forests? Going back just a bit further, another 50 years or so, our coniferous highlands supported a population of the largest woodpecker the world has ever known, the endemic Imperial Woodpecker, which, size-wise, made America's Ivorybill look like a chickadee and could give many raptors a run for their money!

Today the Imperial Woodpecker is lost; the King Vulture is extirpated on Mexico's west coast north of the State of Guerrero; and the endangered Yellow-headed Parrot is, at least in the Vallarta region, a distant memory seen mostly in the minds of old timers. They are more likely to be seen in a cage than in the wild; illegally taken from their nests as babies decades ago, they are aging prisoners of a bygone era. The last known documented record of Yellow-headed Parrots flying wild and free in the Vallarta region was made in March of 2008 by celebrated local bird guide, Alejandro Martínez Rodríguez, as he was guiding two incredibly lucky birders, Gerry and Gale Knudsen, in the Valle de Banderas.

The trio made this historic observation near Desembocada, between Puerto Vallarta and Las Palmas. They watched, spellbound, as two Yellow-headed Parrots in the prime of life frolicked right before their eyes! “[The birds] looked to be in mating behavior, feeding low in the vegetation, [giving] us good looks for some 10-20 minutes as we followed along the road, watching them flit from tree to tree”, said Martínez in a recent email interview.



Today, the world population of wild Yellow-headed Parrots numbers approximately just 4700 birds due to illegal capture for the pet trade and habitat destruction. A few widely disjunct populations occur in four countries—Mexico, Belize, Guatemala and Honduras. These populations are almost insular now, and one, located on the Islas Tres Marias, is, literally, just that! “Safe” for now, due to the presence of a federal penal colony off the coast of Nayarit.

It's easy to get depressed over the disappearance of birds from our skies. However, all is not lost! In recent years ambitious programs have been initiated to bring back the related Scarlet Macaws to their former range in Los Tuxtlas, Veracruz, and to bolster numbers in the Las Guacamayas region of Chiapas, with encouraging results, giving us hope. Even the California Condor—one of the rarest birds on the planet—is again nesting in Baja California's Parque Nacional Sierra San Pedro de Martir, after being extirpated half a century ago. The Chamela-Cuixmala Biosphere Reserve on the south coast of Jalisco protects nesting Yellow-headed Parrots and breeding Jaguars that may one day repopulate suitable and still contiguous habitat in the Vallarta region.

When will we as humans ever learn from our mistakes and their consequences? What will the future hold? The verdict is still out, and our actions determine if we can play judge, plaintiff, or the accused.

Mexican Orchid of the Month: *Notylia orbicularis*

Article by: Marcos Gómez Cervantes,
Propagation Coordinator, VBG

Photo by: Juvenal Aragón Parada

Since last November, the Vallarta Botanical Garden has been working with researchers from the CUCBA campus of the University of Guadalajara on a monthly study of the phenology of *Magnolia vallartensis*. During our last expedition to a magnolia forest near the headwaters of the Palo Maria River, we were glad to find blossoms of many interesting species in addition to the fragrant magnolias. Among them was the twig orchid, *Notylia orbicularis*.

This plant inhabits the dry forests of Mexico's east and west coasts with records southward to Guatemala and Belize. Nevertheless, specimens along Mexico's West Coast are a subspecies, referred to as "*warfordiae*", so our sighting may help lead to a better understanding of the distribution of this variety.

At first observation, neither its color nor its perfume are particularly striking, but close attention to the flowers, and a bit of imagination, reveals their forms like tiny people hanging from the stem.

This species blossoms from April to June, so observant hikers of our region's mountains may still be lucky enough to find this delightful flower during their explorations!

Reference:

- Salazar, G.A. (1994). Identity and synonymy of *Notylia orbicularis* (Orchidaceae: Oncidiinae). *Lyndleyana* 9. (3): 175-182



Conservationists at Work: The Rebound of the Vallarta Region's Military Macaw

By: Claudia Méndez, *Aves del Paraíso*; and Neil Gerlowski, Vallarta Botanical Garden



Photo: Luis Morales

As part of an extended Earth Day Celebration at the Vallarta Botanical Garden, on April 23rd volunteers and guests took a field trip to the Rancho El Santuario (about a 20 minute drive from the Garden) to participate in the installation of a new nest box for the native Military Macaw, one of the largest and most colorful parrots in the Americas. Intrepid climbers scaled to nearly the uppermost branches of an impressive pine tree of well over 20 meters to set up an anchor and hoisting system for the nest box, an octagonal structure of about 1.3 meters high and 90 kilograms in weight. The mass of this giant nest box was great enough to sway the mighty pine back and forth each time the muscular team of volunteers on the ground heaved on the rope to pull it into place.

The original impetus for this conservation project was a response to a senselessly cruel crime against nature. While visiting his ranch back in December of 2012, Francisco Espinoza Ibarra was horrified and saddened to see that someone had cut down the hollow old pine on

his property that was home to an entire colony of Military Macaws. The way the nest cavity was carved up by chain saw cuts was clear evidence that the motivation was to poach the hatchlings for sale on the black market as illegal pets. Not only did the former company of these majestic birds provide Francisco and his family with great joy, they were an excellent draw for tourists who would pay to see them, thereby providing an economic incentive for their continued care. Something needed to be done to give them a second chance! As a response to this tragedy, volunteers from throughout Cabo Corrientes, Puerto Vallarta and beyond came together to install segments of the original trunk as “resurrected” nest sites. With the technical support of the Vallarta Botanical Garden and Vallarta Adventures, the project was quickly off the ground. Fast forwarding to the following nest season, miracle of miracles occurred and both nest boxes were occupied and resulted in yet another generation of young *guacamayas* (Spanish for “macaws”).

Thanks in part to a donation of climbing equipment from Defenders of Wildlife, Francisco, along with his family and friends, have been installing more boxes and the guacamaya population at their ranch is expanding beyond their wildest dreams. The most recently installed nest box is number nine of the new generation of boxes designed and built by Jorge Novoa, Francisco's brother-in-law. The patron of this particular box is Todd McGrain, founder of *The Lost Bird Project*, a New York based not-for-profit dedicated to conservation and awareness building for threatened species of birds across the planet, and especially here in North America. McGrain was amazed by the work of Francisco and Jorge after visiting El Rancho Santuario in March at the invitation of the Vallarta Botanical Garden to participate in the Vallarta Bird Festival.

On the day of this most recent nest box installation, Vallarta Botanical Garden administrators pledged the sponsorship two more nest boxes, in honor of "Aves del Paraíso" a local not-for profit caring for rescued parrots. Another participant, Vallarta Botanical Garden member Susana Borneman, pledged a box as well, which will bring the total amount within the Rancho el Santuario to an even dozen by the summer rainy season. Aside from sponsoring a nest box (5,000 pesos or 250 USD each including carpentry, custom engraving, and installation) other sponsorship opportunities include donations to expand the preserve land of the Rancho El Santuario (currently at about 65 hectares), and installing solar powered cameras (to deter poachers, monitor the birds, and allow people from all over the world to visit virtually). Those of you lucky enough to live in the Vallarta Region or have occasion to visit can experience the thrill of bird watching at the Rancho El Santuario for yourselves. A guided tour is only 200 pesos per person for groups of three or more, otherwise a minimum amount of 500 pesos is charged for either individuals or pairs. Nature tours are even more rewarding when you know that you're contributing to great local conservation!

Tours to Rancho El Paraíso may be booked as follows:
by phone: **322 223 6234**
or email: **novoapv@hotmail.com**.



Photo: Astrid Fritsch Jordán

Give Every Month – Become a Garden “GEM”

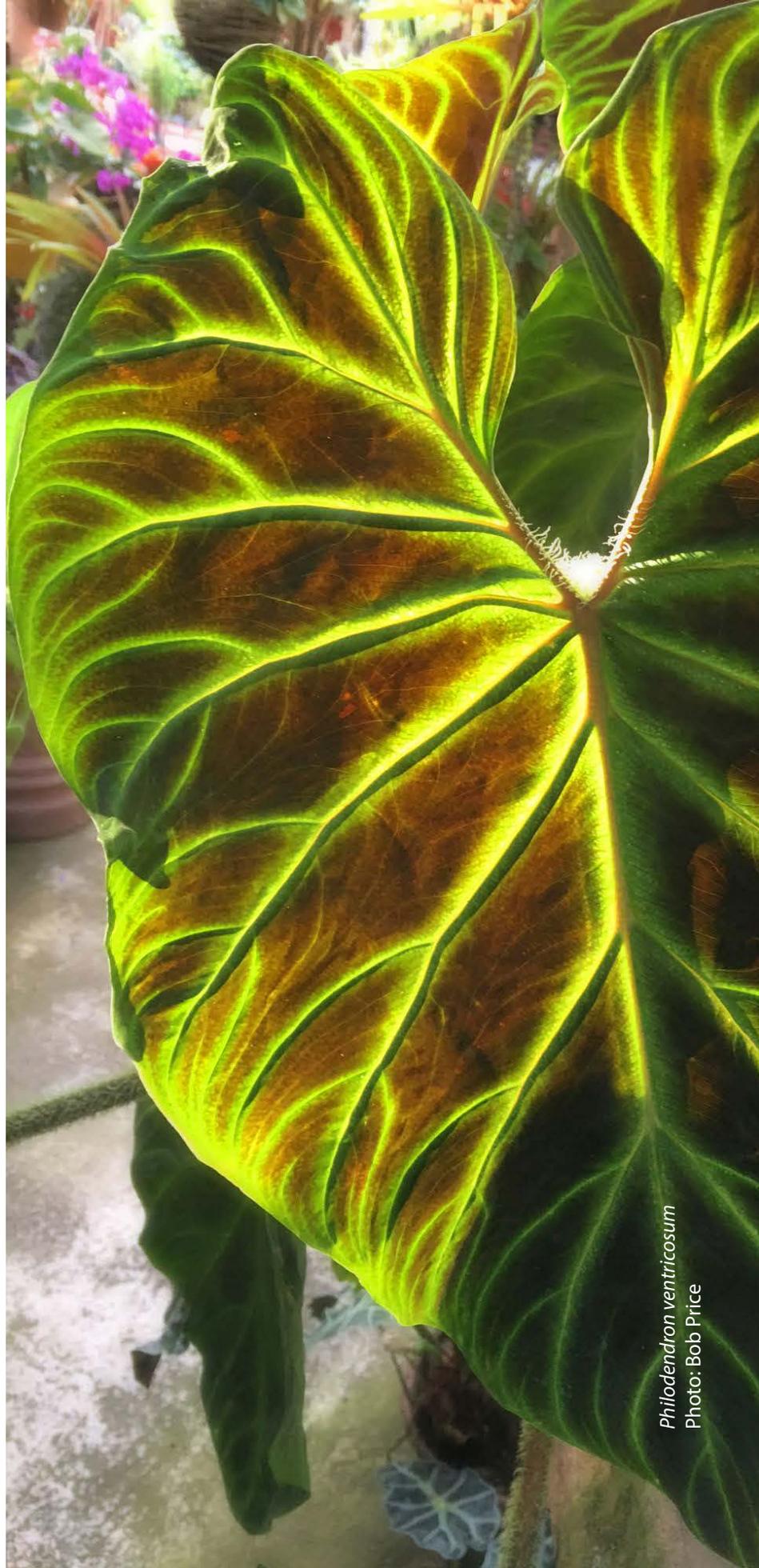
Dividing your contributions to the Vallarta Botanical Garden into monthly payments can help you better budget your annual giving and allows us a dependable monthly income to carry the Garden through the slower times of the year. A new Give Every Month “GEM” page is now up on the Garden’s website www.vbgardens.org for you to begin this kind of contribution today.

Commemorative Cantera Benches

Would you like to honor or memorialize someone with a permanent cantera bench at the Vallarta Botanical Garden? Benches are finished with beautiful hand-painted ceramic tiles. We can help you create a custom design with text and images of your choice. Prices are at \$7,000 USD for a *Banca Real* (Regal Bench) and \$5,000 USD for a *Banca Distintiva* (Distinctive Bench). Dividing this up into payments over the course of three years is a commitment of only \$194 or \$139 USD per month. These gifts qualify for tax-deductible contributions in Mexico, the US, and Canada. Interested? Great! Please visit our website or call 322 223 6182 and ask to speak to the Garden’s Membership Coordinator, Michaela Flores.

Your Legacy Lives on at the VBG

Including the Vallarta Botanical Garden in your wills, trusts, and estate planning is an investment in the long-term viability of this important natural sanctuary for Puerto Vallarta and the exquisite flora of Mexico and world tropics. A member of the Garden’s Legacy Committee would be happy to talk to you about the best options for optimizing your philanthropic potential and further blessing a community. Please write to info@vbgardens.org.



Philodendron ventricosum
Photo: Bob Price

Do you have a special flower that you feel connected to when you visit the Vallarta Botanical Garden?

How would you like to experience your connection in your home?

What if you could have a painting of your favorite flower and make a meaningful contribution to the Vallarta Botanical Garden at the same time?

I am a passionate believer in the importance of supporting the Vallarta Botanical Garden as a special sanctuary for all of us in Puerto Vallarta and our visitors.

In an effort to give back to the Vallarta Botanical Garden community I would offer 50% of the proceeds for up to 15 personalized custom floral paintings to help further the Garden's mission and vision.

If you would like to enjoy your special piece of the Garden in your home everyday please reach out soon!

Contact Cheryl at: wheelercheryl@me.com

Cheryl Wheeler
ART



Nymphaea spp.
Photo: Bart Pass





Escuela Primaria General Pública Independencia, Pitillal
 Photo: Mtro. Emilio Contreras Reyes

Education and Volunteer Report

By Edith Cázares, Horticulturist & Educator, VBG

On March 15 we received a group of students and teachers from the genetics class of the J. J. Fernandez de Lizardi High School in Puerto Vallarta. Marcos Gómez helped me tour the students around the Garden and give them a special presentation of the VBG's In Vitro Laboratory which we use for propagating orchids, ferns, and potentially many other kinds of plants.

A second group from the Escuela Primaria General Pública Independencia visited along with Philippa Vernon-Powell, Field Director and Trustee of the UK based non-profit, New Lifeline. Philippa is exploring how her organization can help connect educational programs and projects at the Vallarta Botanical Garden with donors from Europe. We hope to have more news about this to share with you next month!

Monthly tally of visits, program participation, and volunteer service:

April 2017	Total member visits to the VBG:	197 people
	Total non-member visits to the VBG:	3,136 people
	Complimentary entries for organized school groups*: Total participation in daily 1 pm tours:	367
	(suspended until December)	64
	Total participation in special events, classes, or workshops:	418 people
	Total volunteer service hours:	28 hours

* The VBG is happy to provide complimentary entries, guided tours, and educational programming for organized school groups with advanced reservations as one of our services to the Bahía de Banderas, Puerto Vallarta, and Cabo Corrientes communities. Reservation requests should be sent to escolar@vbgardens.org at least 5 days before the requested date of your visit. Requests are granted first come, first served and are scheduled around other events and programs already on our calendar.

Vallarta Botanical Garden's Calendar

DATE	EVENT	COST
GARDEN IS CLOSED ON MONDAYS FROM APRIL UNTIL DECEMBER		
MAY & JUNE	Peak Hummingbird Season at the VBG — The best time of the year to watch and catalog hummingbirds. To this day, 13 different species have been sighted at the VBG.	Included with entry
1 MAY	Labor Day (Mexico)	—
3 MAY	Teacher's Day (US) — Please see page 17 for details.	—
10 MAY	Mother's Day (Mexico) — Please see page 17 for details.	—
13 MAY	Global Big Day — The single most popular day in the world to go birding. Don't forget to add your birding observations to eBird.org so they can be shared with birders all over the planet.	Included with entry
14 MAY	Mother's Day (Canada & US) — Please see page 17 for details.	—
15 MAY	Teacher's Day (Mexico) — Please see page 17 for details.	—

* Some activities subject to change. The most current calendar, often with links to further event information, can be viewed at www.vbgardens.org/calendar.



Sedum burrito
Photo: Bob Price

Garden Hours

Open 7 days/wk

Open 6 days/wk

Early "Bird" Opening

Daily Guided Tour

9 am – 6 pm

for the months of Dec., Jan., Feb., & March (except Christmas & New Year's Day)

(Closed Mondays) April, May, June, July, Aug., Sept., Oct., & Nov.

8 am every Thursday (Offered for the months of Dec., Jan., Feb., & March)

1 pm (Offered for the months of Dec., Jan., Feb., & March)



Cymbidium
Photo: Bart Pass



Michaela Flores,
Membership Coordinator, VBG
memberships@vbgardens.org

From the Memberships Desk

Both Mexico and the US celebrate Teacher’s Day in May. Mexico, the US, and Canada also celebrate another very important type of teacher this month as well—mothers. So why not invite mom, or anyone else you’ve learned from, to the Vallarta Botanical Garden this month to thank them for what they’ve given you.

If you don’t have a gift for them yet, no worries. You can treat them to something in our restaurant, buy them something special in our gift store or give them the gift that continues giving all year—membership to the Garden!

Members: please always wear your membership card when visiting the Garden. This helps our staff and volunteers recognize you as members and offer valuable discounts on your Garden purchases and other important benefits.

Can you find your name on our WALL OF PATRONS?

If you’re not yet “on the wall” we invite you to join
the family that preserves the Garden forever!

Becoming a member is easy & provides great benefits:
www.vbgardens.org/memberships

A high resolution image of this photograph is
available at www.vbgardens.org/benefactors



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Your Donations to the Vallarta Botanical Garden are Greatly Appreciated

México



- **Tax-deduction receipts** are available for donations to the Vallarta Botanical Garden made through the *Fundación Punta de Mita* (FPM).
- **Please send an email earmarking your gift for the Vallarta Botanical Garden to** donaciones@fundacionpuntademita.org **with a copy to** info@vbgardens.org
- In this email please include your name, the date your gift was sent, and the amount of your gift.

Checks may be mailed to:

Fundación Punta de Mita, A.C.
Carretera Federal Libre 200 Km 18.05
Punta Mita, Nayarit, C.P. 63734 México.

- Please provide FPM with your email and information to be included in the tax-deductible receipt (which will be sent by email).
- Please provide FPM with confirmation (copy of check) for tracking.

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Account in Mexican Pesos (MXN):
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Paypal: www.fundacionpuntademita.org/en/how-to-help

Canada



- Our educational programs qualify for **tax-deduction receipts** provided by The Canadian Children's Shelter of Hope Foundation (CCSHF)

Cheques may be mailed to:

Canadian Children's Shelter of Hope Foundation
87 Lavinia Ave
Toronto, ON,
M6S 3H9
Canada

Please write "VBG" for "Vallarta Botanical Gardens" on your cheques.

Alternatively, you may donate using a credit card through CanadaHelps.org (whose donation page is linked to the CCSHF website www.ccs hf.ca) selecting the "Vallarta Botanical Gardens Fund."

USA



- Our direct support 501(c)3, "Friends of Vallarta Botanical Gardens, A.C." issues **tax-deduction receipts:**

Checks may be mailed to:

Friends of Vallarta Botanical Gardens, A.C.
759 North Campus Way
Davis, CA 95616

Wire transfers / direct deposits are accepted:

Please write to treasurer@vbgardens.org for routing and account numbers.

Credit Card Payments:

Call us w/ your card info: +52 322 223 6182

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