

Heliconia

latispatha
of Guatemala

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Digital-photography.org

Heliconia *latispatha* of Guatemala

in the wild (not in a garden)

Santa Rosa (Departamento), Guatemala

Species Identification: Senaida Ba
Photography: Dr. Nicholas Hellmuth and Erick Flores
Design and Layout: Su Lin Chang

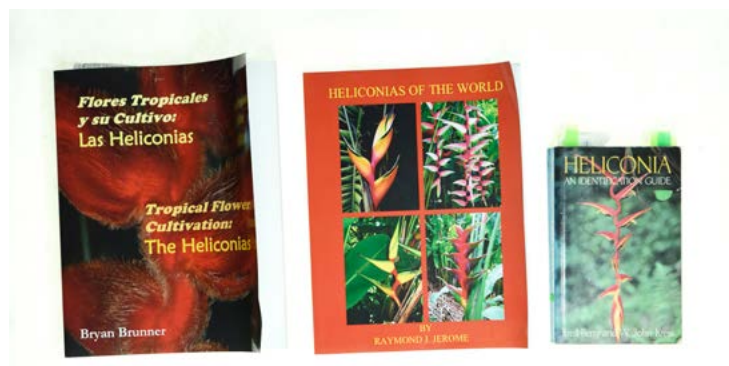
FLAAR MESOAMERICA 2017

Most discussions of *Heliconia*
**of the world are weak on
 Heliconia of Guatemala**

Book after book, article after article, on *Heliconia* of the world are incomplete on the *Heliconia* of Guatemala. If a complete discussion exists (which I hope it does), I have not yet found it (and would appreciate citations and PDF if you know of one).

Because of this lack of in-person research on *Heliconia* of Guatemala, I have been spending time over the last year taking notes on where we have found *Heliconia* out in the wild. We now have the most complete list, but until funding is available, it is a challenge to process and publish all our information and photographs. But when possible we will publish find-by-find.

(species by species). Here we report on an area with considerable quantity of a wild *Heliconia* which we believe to be *Heliconia latispatha*. There is also a taller *Heliconia* in exactly the same eco-system but we need to return to harvest more information on the second species (since we need to find it in bloom).



Here are three books on *Heliconia* that we bought recently. Not one includes significant fieldwork throughout all of Guatemala. Most books on *Heliconia* are primarily on garden varieties. We will have a complete bibliography as a separate PDF later this year.

The only way I accept that a *Heliconia* is native to Guatemala is to find it out in the world. Finding the plants in a garden is not enough.

Another reason we want to find each species out in the wild, is to document the size, shape, arrangement, and quantity of bracts. *Heliconia latispatha* comes in many completely different sizes and shapes and color tones.

I am particularly interested in *Heliconia latispatha* since some books do not list it for Guatemala. However Standley and Steyermark very clearly list this species for Guatemala (1952: 182-183), which makes its absence in other monographs all the more noticeable.



Finca el Jute, Río de los Esclavos, Santa Rosa, Guatemala.

Photography by Erick Flores, Canon EOS-1DX Mark II, EF180mm f/3.5L Macro USM, speed 1/125, f/5.0, ISO 2000

Bract with flower at the right and seeds at the left.



Finca el Jute, Río de los Esclavos, Santa Rosa, Guatemala.

Photography by Erick Flores, Canon EOS-1DX Mark II, EF180mm f/3.5L Macro USM, speed 1/125, f/5.0, ISO 2000

Greenish flowers sticking up out of the red and yellow bracts.



Finca el Jute, Rio de los Esclavos, Santa Rosa, Guatemala.

Photography by Erick Flores, Canon EOS-1D X Mark II, EF180mm f/3.5L Macro USM, speed 1/125, f /5.0, ISO 2000

Closeup. Notice the bracts are red and yellow; not very orange.



Finca el Jute, Río de los Esclavos, Santa Rosa, Guatemala.

Photography by Nicholas Hellmuth, Nikon D810, Sigma 50mm f/1.4 lens, speed 1/200, f /4.5, ISO 5000

Heliconia species in a dry area of **Guatemala**

The area on both sides of the Rio de los Esclavos, in this part of Santa Rosa, is a seasonally dry forest. But along any river, the eco-system is completely different.

The Finca el Jute has springs flowing out of the ground most of the year. July is the height of the rainy season and this area is like a leaking swamp. I was frankly surprised that even a 4WD pickup truck did not get stuck.

No matter how dry the high hills are, the low areas vary between very moist and swamp-like.

The *Heliconia* were in masses over many parts of the wet shaded areas. A significantly higher species (2 or more meters high) was on one edge of the small species. We will have to return when the property caretaker can make a trail to reach the larger *heliconia* when it is flowering. It was late in the day and if we get stuck you need to have enough daylight hours to get out. So there was not time to find the other species flowering (though I estimate most *heliconia* are flowering in their local rainy season).



To get here:

But before reaching the river, turn right onto highway SRO-16 (with signs towards Chiquimulilla). Do not confuse that with Chiquimula.

About 10 minutes after getting on this highway, circa km 68 to 69, is the entrance to the finca on your left. If you reach a tiny roadside store on the left you have gone too far.

Be sure you have permission of the landowner, Juan Carlos Fernandez. And be sure you have an appointment with the property supervisor who lives here.

You will need high axel 4WD with off-road tires. No low 4WD SUV can survive; and no highway tires can get you through the mud. We used an old Mazda 4WD double-cabin pickup truck.



Click on the map



Finca el Jute, Rio de los Esclavos, Santa Rosa, Guatemala.

Photography by Nicholas Hellmuth, Nikon D810, Sigma 50mm f/1.4 lens, speed 1/40, f /8.0, ISO 3200

Most Common Heliconia species **native to Guatemala**

Heliconia latispatha and *Heliconia collinsiana* are the most common in Guatemala. We have work-in-progress with tabulations, species by species, where they are found in Guatemala.



Heliconia latispatha, at the turnoff towards La Tinta from the Senahú to Telimán highway.



Heliconia collinsiana, 50 meters uphill before the turn-off towards La Tinta from the Senahú to Telimán highway.

Then we have a tabulation, departamento by departamento, which Heliconia species are found in each departamento (roughly equivalent to a state in Mexico or USA).

We estimate the species is
Heliconia latispatha Benth.

Heliconia latispatha Benth. Bot. Voy. Sulph. 170. 1844.

Pico de gurrion (Santa Rosa); Bijao (Petén); Platanillo; Sue (Quecchi). Wet forest or thickets, often abundant in second growth, ascending from sea level to about 1,400 meters, but most abundant at low elevations; Peten; Alta Verapaz; Izabal; Santa Rosa; Escuintla; Suchitepequez; Retalhuleu. Southern Mexico; British Honduras to Panama; Colombia.

Plants glabrous or nearly so, rather stout, commonly 1.5-2.5 meters high; leaves long-petiolate, oblong, often a meter long, mostly 20-30 cm. wide, short-acuminate,

rounded to subacute and usually oblique at the base, slightly glaucous or green beneath; inflorescence erect, pedunculate, the bracts deep or bright red, widely spaced, narrowly lanceolate, spreading, the lowest often dilated at the apex into large green blades, often tinged with orange or yellow, or sometimes yellow or orange throughout, the middle ones about 15 cm. long and 1.5-2 cm. high at the base, long-attenuate; flowers 3-3.5 cm. long, pedicellate, the pedicels glabrous or pilose, the perianth greenish yellow.

The inflorescences are sometimes called "cuchillos" in Salvador. On the Pacific slope this species is particularly plentiful, growing not only in ravines of the foothills but far out upon the plains, in either forest or open places. Some of these habitats become very dry in the verano but are doubtless exceedingly wet during the rainy season.

1952, Musaceae. In Flora of Guatemala - Part III. Fieldiana, Bot. 24(3): 182-183.



Bibliography

We have a more complete bibliography on Heliconia of Mesoamerica on www.maya-art-books.org. But here are some basic resources, especially for photos of heliconia.

BERRY, F and KREES, W.J.

1991 Heliconia, an identification guide. Smithsonian Institution Press. 334 Pages.

An essential monograph by capable botanists, but most of their research seems to have been in Costa Rica, Colombia and in countries other than Guatemala. We have made a list of all the species of heliconia which other botanists have listed for Guatemala but are either totally missing in the nice Berry and Kress monograph or if present, do not list Guatemala as where the species can be found. Now that the roads in Guatemala allow 4WD pickup trucks to reach remote areas, if you know local people (so you can get access to their fields and forests) you can find a lot more heliconia in Guatemala.

BRUNNER, Byron

2017 Flores tropicales y su Cultivo; Las Heliconias. Tropical Flower Cultivation: The Heliconias, 418 pages.

A helpful monograph, but (as is typical of 90% of monographs on Heliconia) does not include field work on Heliconia of Guatemala. So *Heliconia spissa* is conspicuously missing in his nice species-by-species descriptions. *Heliconia spissa* is only in miscellaneous lists without the information of the kind that is needed here in Guatemala. We found about ten *Heliconia spissa* plants in one area of the mountains of Alta Verapaz, Guatemala, so we know it is native to Guatemala. Large page size, soft cover. No publisher listed anywhere whatsoever on the book. Spanish and English text.

JEROME, Raymond J.

2017 Heliconias of the World. 109 pages.

Lots of nice photos. But mostly garden varieties. No bibliography. Most *Heliconia* species of Guatemala are not included whatsoever. Thus a better title would be Nice Photos of Gorgeous Heliconia Flowers for your Garden. No publisher listed anywhere, but Amazon lists CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform. Amazon lists 112 pages but the last three pages are blank so I list 109 pages.

BERRY, F and KREES, W.J.

1952 Flora of Guatemala, Part II, Fieldiana Bot. Vol. 24, part 3: 178-191.

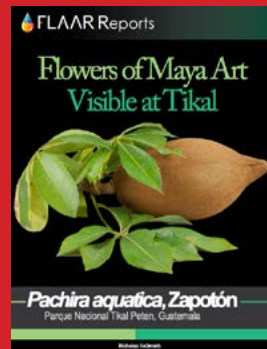
STANDLEY, Paul C. and Julian A. STEYERMARK

1952 Flora of Guatemala, Part II, Fieldiana Bot. Vol. 24, part 3: 182-183.

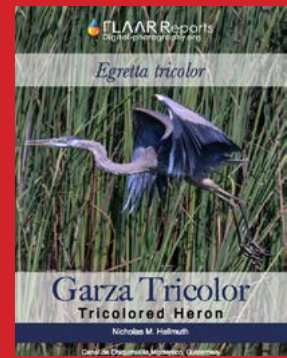
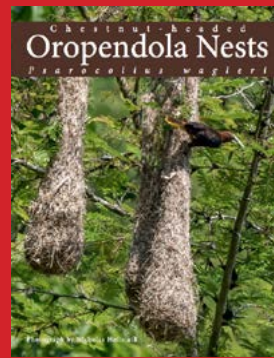
This is the best list of *Heliconia* for Guatemala, but with a date of 1952, definitely needs fresh research from today.

Acknowledgements

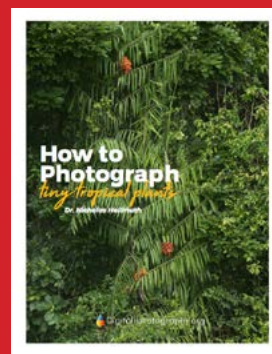
We thank the owner of Finca El Jute, don Juan Carlos Fernandez, for permission to search for plants on his finca. We also thank the watchman for his help when we visit this finca.



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