



Plant of the Month

August 2019

Common Name: Butterfly Amaryllis
Scientific Name: *Hippeastrum papilio* (Ravenna) Van Scheepen
Family: Amaryllidaceae
Genus: from the Greek *Hippeus* for knight and *Astron* for star
Species epithet: Latin for butterfly, as the petals resemble the wings of the Swallowtail Butterfly



Distribution
 Atlantic coast of southern Brazil.

Native Habitat
 Tropical forest, where it grows as an epiphyte on trees. An epiphyte is a plant that grows non-parasitically on other plants, often the branches of trees. This allows the plant access to light not available on the forest floor.

Description
 Evergreen bulb with fleshy linear leaves to 60 cm long, may be herbaceous in cooler climates. Bulbs are large up to 20 cm diameter. Large bulbs produce off-sets that can be separated during the warmer months.

Reproduction
 Flowers are born on long stems and are held above the foliage in late winter and spring. They vary in colour from white through to apple-green with carmine, maroon or purple striations.

Location in Garden
 Middle Garden beside the main path towards the large Wollemi Pine. Hybrids using this species can also be seen in our Tropical Garden and above the Herb Garden.

Information
 This species was first described from plants discovered growing in a garden in Southern Brazil in 1970. It was assumed to be extinct in the wild until 1990, when a Californian plant breeder, Fred Meyer, observed it growing on tall trees in the southern Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul. The current wild population is unclear but the Pacific Bulb Society estimates it at 50 plants occurring within a 10 square kilometre patch of Atlantic Forest habitat. The Atlantic forests of Brazil are a biodiversity hotspot and although extensively cleared, remnants are now preserved as a World Heritage Site.

In 2011, scientists yielded substantial amounts of galanthamine and hydroxgalanthamine, alkaloids used in the treatment of Alzheimer's disease from *Hippeastrum papilio*.

This species does not display signs of infection by Hippeastrum Mosaic Virus (HMV) and is also one of the most vigorous of the Hippeastrums making it important for plant breeding. In cultivation it thrives in a well-drained, organically enriched soil and is excellent in pots. The neck of the bulb should be planted at or just below soil level. Plants are available from our Growing Friends nursery.


 #RBGSydney

