



## NEW ENGLAND CARNIVOROUS PLANT SOCIETY

March 2007 Newsletter

NECPS's March 2007 meeting will be held on

**SATURDAY MARCH 10<sup>TH</sup> at 12:30 PM at**

**Roger Williams Park Casino  
1000 Elmwood Avenue, Providence, RI 02907**

### **NECPS Mission Statement**

***"The mission of the New England Carnivorous Plant Society shall be to share, to gain knowledge of, and to achieve expertise in all phases of growing, education, appreciation, and conservation of carnivorous plants in both culture and in native habitats."***

### **Message from the President**

Hello All,

What a great time to be a plant person in New England, and what a great time for the NECPS. After years and years of hard work, setbacks and waiting, the Botanical Gardens at Roger Williams Park have finally opened! Over 1,200 square feet of new display greenhouse space, with a permanent indoor Carnivorous plant display and bog garden that the NECPS will be a major part of. A wonderful place for the NECPS to call home, to work in partnership with, and to grow with.

In every bit of literature and press I have seen about the gardens, the Carnivorous Plant display has always been highlighted! The greenhouse staff has told me over and over how people had been coming in asking to see that display. And even more is planned, the “Nepenthes Wall” and additional carnivorous plants scattered around the indoor and outdoor gardens are still in the future.

The date is already been set for the NECPS fall show, September 27 and 28, 2007. The person who does the scheduling for the gardens has already been asked to reserve that date. We’ve gotten a response from Black Jungle confirming they will be there. We will be looking for more people to exhibit at our show, which will be held in the new Botanical gardens. The partnership between the Botanical gardens and the NECPS can and will be one where we ALL benefit and help spread the word about and showcase the plants , and the society, we enjoy so much.

~ John Phillip, Jr.

## **NECPS Program: March 10, 2007**

### **“Understanding Lady-Slipper Orchids”**

**Presented by: William Cullina**

**Cosponsored by: The NECPS and the RI Orchid Society**

Lady-slipper orchids are at once the most loved and most misunderstood of wildflowers. They are the subject of frequent questions such as “Are they impossible to grow?” and “Can I transplant one?” This talk delves into the fascinating and complicated world of Cypripediums to provide the answers to everything the audience ever wanted to know about these amazing wildflowers.

William Cullina holds degrees in plant science and psychology and has been working in plant propagation and nursery production for over twenty years. In 1995 he became nursery manager and propagator at the New England Wild Flower Society’s Garden in the Woods and Nasami Farm, where he is currently the director of the New England Wild Flower Society Nurseries—now the largest of its kind in New England with locations in Framingham and Whately, MA. Cullina lectures on native plants and propagation to garden and professional groups and writes for popular and technical journals. His first book, *The New England Wild Flower Society Guide to Growing and Propagating Wildflowers of the United States and Canada*, was published by Houghton Mifflin in 2000. A follow-up volume: *Native Trees, Shrubs, and Vines—A guide to using, growing and propagating North American woody plants* was published in June 2002. His new book, *Understanding Orchids* was published in November, 2004.

#### **Other business:**

- Members are encouraged to bring plants for display. There will be no silent auction.

## **CP Tidbit for March**

While the form, colors, and trapping mechanisms of CPs are fascinating, I also enjoy reading about their ecology, their evolution, and the various uses our ancestors found for them. Here, I’d like to share some interesting information I’ve acquired from my reading regarding the various influences a

particular species, *Pinguicula vulgaris* (common butterwort), has had on humans for the past few hundred years.

In 1875, Charles Darwin published the well-known book *Insectivorous Plants*. This book provided, from the data obtained from innumerable experiments, proof that some plants are capable of not only capturing small animals, but also of digesting their tissues and assimilating the nutrients. That was over one-hundred years ago, but people have known of carnivorous plants for much longer than that, though they were probably unaware of their carnivorous nature.

Diverse, but mainly beneficial, properties were attached to this plant in the past. The 1635 edition of Gerard's Herbal, states that the women of Yorkshire lathered cow udders with the plant's mucilage whenever they were 'bitten by any venomous worme' or when they were chapped. Alpine peasants of Eastern Europe still practiced this until relatively recently. In Elizabethan times it was rumored to protect cattle from the effects of elf arrows and humans from the effect of witches and faeries! In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the leaves were recommended as an effective means of killing human lice. In Scandinavian countries used the common butterwort to curdle milk, and probably still do in certain remote villages. The milk was either poured over the plants or the mucilage of the leaves was mixed into the milk by smearing it on the container. A ropery substance forms which doesn't separate from the whey—this substance is called "Tätmiölk" by the Lapps of Scandinavia. Butter can be made from the curdled milk and this is where the common name of *Pinguicula*—the butterwort—stems from. The butterwort has had a variety of medicinal uses derived from its antispasmodic properties, from treating Pertussis (whooping cough) to use as a purgative agent.

However, despite its many uses, the common butterwort was considered to be a destructive plant by farmers who blamed it as the agent causing the dreaded "Liver Rot" disease in sheep. This belief was not unreasonable as wherever the plant was found, so too was found the Rot. Modern science has since shown the disease is caused by the Liver Fluke which spends two parts of its complicated life cycle as a free-swimming organism in the soil, another as a parasite of a snail, and a fourth as a parasite of sheep (if it is fortunate) after it has attached itself to a blade of grass which has to be swallowed by the animal! There are, of course, flukes that parasitize humans—indeed, in addition to causing acute illness due to their invasion, they are the leading cause of bladder, liver, and biliary cancers in the developing world! But I digress.....

There is much more to be said about this topic. A person can spend a good portion of their time studying only one topic related to carnivorous plants. I recommend you spend some free time learning about the ecology, evolution, and of the history of these plants—you'll discover facts that are as fascinating as the trapping mechanisms of these plants!

~ Ken Sicard

## Secretary's Minutes

**February 10, 2007 — Attendance: 24**

### Meeting Notes:

- Priscilla Purinton led the meeting which consisted of planting the bog garden at the new RWP Greenhouses. No official business was discussed, nor was an auction or plant display held.
- Meeting Conclusion: Priscilla Purinton concluded the meeting.

## Events of Note

- Two members, Bill Matthews and Ken Sicard, won awards at local flower shows!

--**Bill Matthews** won 2<sup>nd</sup> place in the Connecticut Flower Show for his "Botanical Collection" of five Nepenthes.



--**Ken Sicard** won "Best of Show" and 1<sup>st</sup> place for his *Drosera capensis* 'typical,' 1<sup>st</sup> place for *Drosera nitidula* 'omissa' x *Drosera pulchella*, 2<sup>nd</sup> place for *Mammillaria elongata*, and 3<sup>rd</sup> place for *Gasteria gracilis* 'white' at the Central Massachusetts Flower Show.



*Drosera capensis* 'typical'



Gasteria gracilis 'white'



Mammillaria elongata

- The NECPS gets some more newspaper press! See attachment sent with email for pictures.

## Flesh-Eating Freaks

### Carnivorous Plants Captivate Gardeners Looking For Action As Well As Beauty

By WILLIAM WEIR  
The Hartford Courant

February 19 2007

In life, adventure movies and campy musicals, the carnivorous plant holds a special fascination.

And why not? Growing carnivorous plants offers all the botanical fun of any other plant, plus action and violence. They deviously lure prey to their demise. They emit sweet bug-luring scents that eventually drag their prey to them, and - bwahahaha! - lunch is served. Rather than absorbing nutrients from the soil, these plants show a certain assertiveness and self-sufficiency.

"They're just more interesting than other plants," Emily Troiano of Wakefield, R.I., says at a recent meeting of the New England Carnivorous Plant Society. It was a special meeting for planting at a new conservatory in the Roger Williams Park Botanical Center in Providence.

"I don't know if 'macabre' is the right word," she says. Indeed, it was the word most members used to describe the plants' appeal.

A count of society members wasn't available, but about 15 people typically attend the monthly meetings. Always held in Rhode Island, members regularly come from Connecticut, Massachusetts and New York. Its annual show in October draws from even farther.

There are other carnivorous plant societies in the U.S., but most are online or meet seasonally. The New England group apparently is the only one that meets monthly, and it has done so consistently.

So what's the big deal about carnivorous plants?

"For most people, it's because they do things, and they're really beautiful," says Bill Matthews, who makes the 90-minute drive every month from Manchester.

"You can actually watch the plant in action," says his wife, Dena. "All the plants, especially the Venus flytrap, you can watch it move quickly. Some people have a diabolical need to watch them catch bugs and trap them and eat them."

Many in the society are scientifically minded, like Dena and Bill Matthews (everyone in the society calls him "Wild Bill," the origins of which are mysterious; he's actually a well-mannered fellow). They run LifeHouse Productions, creators of animation and graphics for medical presentations. They have about 300 carnivorous plants.

It's not always the case that both spouses share a love for meat-eating flora.

"My wife is always saying, 'You're spending more money on plants?'" says Frank Meglio of Cranston, R.I. "I say, 'Would you rather I spend it on a beer at the bar?'"

There's Robert Rafka and his 16-year-old daughter, Lauren, from Stonington, who have made carnivorous plants a family project. She took up the hobby after a challenge from her sixth-grade teacher and liked it.

"It's not often you see plants eating bugs," she says. Now the Rafkas have about 20 plants and a sign that says: "Danger: Keep Fingers Away."

Carnivorous plants tend to grow where there's poor soil. Bogs (their usual habitat) rarely have enough of the nitrogen that plants need to survive, so some plants evolved with other means of getting it - namely trapping it. Digesting their prey usually takes a few days.

And each plant has its own fiendish gimmick for doing so. The sundew has sticky, hairy leaves that

entangle flies and other insects. Most famously, the Venus flytrap has the jaw-like "snap trap." The tropical pitcher plant is outfitted with "pitfall traps" (deep, slippery pockets with digestive enzymes at the bottom).

Like a botanical Bigfoot, a man-eating plant legendarily exists somewhere in South America. Occasionally a pitcher plant will consume a small rodent, lizard or bird that falls into one of its traps, but anything bigger than that is unlikely.

If the plants are kept outside, they can usually fend for themselves. Inside, owners often feed their plants fish food. Crickets are also popular; they're easier to handle if you freeze them, Rafka says.

The average person can grow carnivorous plants, but maintaining them can be tricky, says Matthew Opel, a research laboratory aide in the University of Connecticut's Ecology and Evolutionary Biology Department. Opel is revered in the society for his preternaturally green thumb. He helps oversee UConn's greenhouse, well known in carnivorous-plant circles for its enviable collection.

Many novices kill their plants fairly quickly, he says, because they require pure water, direct sunlight and the proper soil. Or they'll throw plants out, thinking they've died, not knowing they go dormant in the winter. But Opel emphasizes that he doesn't want to discourage anyone from taking up the hobby.

Indeed, what carnivorous-plant lovers seek out the most - more than the exotic *Nepenthes bicalcarata*, or *Utricularia livida* - are other carnivorous-plant lovers. Besides trading advice, war stories and the plants themselves, the members seem to get a kick out of each other.

The conversations take hairpin turns among the members, and odd bits of trivia get flung around. Did you know, for example, that some of the plants emit a hypnotic substance to put their prey to sleep? So says Rafka, who adds that some indigenous societies have used it as a psychedelic. And it might be effective in treating burns, adds daughter Lauren.

"The plants are amazing," says Priscilla Purinton of West Kingston, R.I., vice president of the society. "but the people are what you come for."



TROPICAL PITCHER PLANTS are among the new attractions that members of the New England Carnivorous Plant Society planted last weekend in a new conservatory at Roger Williams Park Botanical Center in Providence. Insects go into those openings and don't come out. (TIA ANN CHAPMAN)



Matthew Opel of Storrs, Conn., a member of the New England Carnivorous Plant Society, plants venus flytrap plants at the Charles H. Smith Greenhouses in Providence, R.I. (TIA ANN CHAPMAN)



Emily Troiano of Wakefield, R.I., right, and Matthew Opel of Storrs, Conn. handle carnivorous plants at the Charles H. Smith Greenhouses in Providence, R.I. (TIA ANN CHAPMAN)





TRIMMING a dormant carnivorous plant are, from left, Ken Sicard of Worcester, Mass.; Zack Severino of Scituate, R.I.; Andreia Stiffler of Cambridge, Mass.; and Dave Sackett of Dracut, Mass. (TIA ANN CHAPMAN)

## **Nursery / Mail Orders**

- The Wistuba order has been placed. However, Andreas is making periodic updates to his website ([www.wistuba.com](http://www.wistuba.com)) and will accept updates to our order until April. So if you'd like to order additional plants, please email your request to me (include the plant name, code, and price). The plants will be shipped to the NECPS PO Box sometime after late April. John Phillip will collect the plants and a special pickup meeting will be held where members will have the opportunity to pick up their plants on the weekend after they've arrived. These meetings will likely be held at the Roger Williams Park and possibly also in Worcester, MA. If you cannot attend the pickup meeting, you may contact John and arrange a place and time to pickup the plants, at his discretion. As a last resort, you may pickup your plants at the following NECPS meeting. Once they arrive, I suggest you pickup your plants as soon as possible due to their fragile nature. You must pay for your plants when you pick them up so please have cash or a check with you. As discussed at prior meetings, any extra plants will be auctioned or raffled. Please contact me with any questions.

~ Ken Sicard, Nursery Mail Order Coordinator

## **Library News**

- Please contact me to suggest books that should be purchased.  
~ Shaun Montminy, Librarian

## Treasurer's Report

February 2007

<u>Income:</u>	
Dues	0.00
Clothing	0.00
Auction	0.00
TOTAL	0.00
<u>Expenses:</u>	39.24
<u>Total Balance for February Meeting</u>	-39.24

- Membership dues were due in January for the 2007 year—if you haven't paid your dues yet, please do so. Dues are \$10 for students, \$20 for adults, and \$25 for families. Dues may be paid in cash or check made out to "NECPS." A copy of the membership renewal form is attached at the end of the newsletter for your convenience. Remember to complete a membership renewal form and submit it along with dues to the Membership Secretary, Mike Stiffler. Dues may also be paid by mailing a check to:

NECPS  
PO Box 606  
Saunderstown, RI 02874

~ Dave Sackett, Treasurer

## Program Outline for 2007

Meeting/Event	Location
January 13	Louitt Library
February 10	Roger Williams Park
March 10	Roger Williams Park
April 14	Roger Williams Park (?)
May 12	Roger Williams Park (?)
June 9	NETC, Vermont
July	Great Swamp Bog Walk (no official meeting)
August 11	Blackjungle
September 8	Roger Williams Park (?)
September 29-30	5 <sup>th</sup> Annual NECPS Show (Roger Williams Park)
October 13	Roger Williams Park (?)
November	Roger Williams Park (?)
December 8	Roger Williams Park (?)

- Meetings are held on the second Saturday of each month, except for July when there is no official meeting. We are in the process of finalizing a program outline for 2007. Please contact one of the Officers with questions or if you have a suggestion for a meeting place.

## Officers & Contact Information

President	John Phillip, Jr.	johnatthebeach@cox.net
Vice President	Priscilla Purinton	ppurinton@aol.com
Secretary	Ken Sicard	kenneth.sicard@umassmed.edu
Membership Secretary	Mike Stiffler	stiffler@fas.harvard.edu
Treasurer	Dave Sackett	bid2win1@yahoo.com
Librarian	Shaun Montminy	shaun_montminy@yahoo.com
Nursery / Mail Orders	Ken Sicard	kenneth.sicard@umassmed.edu
Webmasters	Nathan Lovell	lovell@mit.edu
	Emily Troiano	emily.troiano@gmail.com

- NECPS website: [www.necps.org](http://www.necps.org)
- NECPS Yahoo Group: <http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/NECPS/>

## Directions to RWP Casino

- **South on I-95:** Take exit 17 (Elmwood Avenue), left at light, Park entrance is 1/2 block on left.
- **North on I-95:** Take Exit 16 (Elmwood Avenue), bear right, left at light, Park entrance is half a block on right.
- **West on I-195:** I-195 West to I-95 South, Take Exit 17 (Elmwood Avenue), left at light, Park entrance is half a block on left.
- Once you enter the park follow the signs to the "Casino."

# New England Carnivorous Plant Society

An organization for the appreciation and enjoyment of carnivorous plants

## Meeting dates and locations

Generally the society meets the second Saturday of each month at the greenhouse in the Roger Williams Park, Providence, RI, at 12:30 pm. Meetings are occasionally held at other locations.

Visit the website for information on the next meeting and for travel directions:

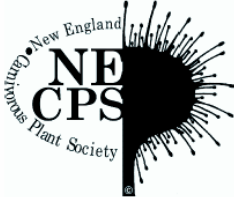
<http://www.NECPS.org>

## Membership

Regular, \$20 / year

Family, \$25 / year

Student (any age), \$10 / year



For more information contact:

**New England Carnivorous Plant Society**

**P.O. Box 606**

**Saunderstown, RI 02874**

**Email: [necps\\_membership@hotmail.com](mailto:necps_membership@hotmail.com)**

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**New England Carnivorous Plant Society**

**Membership Application and Renewal Form**

**Circle One:      New Member      Renewing Member**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_ Year Joined \_\_\_\_\_

How did you hear about the NECPS? \_\_\_\_\_

Would you be able to travel to RI for meetings? Y / N

Would you be interested in being on the NECPS board? Y / N

**New Members Please Pick Up a Welcome Pack (with Membership Card)!**

**Renewing Members Please Pick Up Your New Membership Card!**

Please return this form to NECPS membership secretary Mike Stiffler