

URBAN ANTICS

FLORAL PREDATORS

Each spring, a carpet of colour invades our gardens, street verges, parks and vacant lots.

The nearby Darling Range, with its forested valleys and creeks, bristles with an influx of family picnic groups enjoying the traditional barbecue of snags, chops, a wine or two and forty winks on a warm slab of granite.

It was one of these days that alerted me to an extraordinary wildflower that often goes unnoticed, the sundew or *Drosera*.

While sitting on a somewhat barren patch of ground in the Gleneagle Forest south-east of Perth, a twinkle of sunlight caught my eye. Crawling on my hands and knees to the source, I discovered a plant with a delicate lacework of fine stems and branchlets supporting tiny leaves with droplets of fluid on their hairlike edges.

On closer inspection, I saw two tiny pink flowers perched precariously atop the delicate sundew, *Drosera menziesii*.

Drosera capture insects, attracted to the dewy nectar produced by the glands on their leaves (lamina) and digest their prey through enzymes secreted by the glands.

After landing on the leaf's sticky secretions a struggling insect is trapped in the pool of fluid and drowns.

Most *Drosera* in Australia are found in the South-West. New species are still being discovered in remote parts.

Drosera survive as tubers during summer at 4-60 cm below ground. After summer dormancy (one to four months) the buds shoot and, after the first winter rains, vigorous growth begins.

There are four basic types of *Drosera*; erect *Drosera*, climbing or scrambling *Drosera*, fan-leaved *Drosera* and rosetted *Drosera*.

Rosetted *Drosera* produce their leaves in a flat rosette at ground level.

Climbing or scrambling *Drosera* rely on nearby herbs or shrubs for

support. They attach some of their leaves to the support plant while leaving others to catch prey. The main advantage of the climbing habit is to display flowers above the surrounding vegetation.

Erect *Drosera* are similar, however, their stems are generally strong enough to support themselves. The king of erect sundews *D. gigantea* is an asparagus-like bush a metre high, with flowers at the end of many lateral branches.

Fan-leaved *Drosera* have large fan-shaped leaves, which can easily account for large moths and butterflies, at the base of their main erect or semi-erect stems.

Tuberous *Drosera* produce flowers of varying colour and size, depending on the species. Strong, highly fragrant perfumes attract insects both for pollination and as potential prey.

So when wandering through areas in the South-West, keep your eyes peeled. Not for large foliage or flowers but for that tell-tale wisp of spider-

web and dew-like reflection. It'll be a sundew - but be careful, don't walk on it.

JOHN HUNTER

Did you know...

The famous Albany pitcher plant is a relative of the sundews, but has one large receptacle filled with fluid and an upper trapdoor.

There are one or two reports of small mammals and birds being trapped by the pitchers of *Nepenthes* (a tropical pitcher plant).

Most sundew flowers last only one day. Two tuberous species produce flowers which remain open day and night until pollinated.

Rosetted sundews flower before the vegetated parts are formed, while the climbing and erect species do not flower until after the plant is fully grown.



LANDSCOPE

VOLUME FIVE NO 1 SPRING EDITION 1989



Perth people were devastated when a fire tore through their favourite bushland retreat. But, with Spring, new life and colour is returning.



Rottneest isn't the only unspoilt island on Perth's doorstep- what about Penguin, Garden, Seal and Carnac Islands? They are steeped in history and provide a haven for some unique wildlife.



Algae has clogged the estuaries near Mandurah, killing fish and creating an eyesore. What is the solution?



Explore the waterways of the South-West by canoe.



Jarrah dieback- the word strikes fear into any forester's heart- but research is fuelling the fight against the killer fungus.

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COVER

What's new in Kings Park this spring? Artist, Susan Tingay, couldn't resist this magnificent collection of spring orchids. From left- cowslip orchid (*Caladenia flava*), jug orchid (*Pterostylis recurva*), King spider orchid (*Caladenia huegelii*), donkey orchid (*Diuris longifolia*), rabbit orchid (*Caladenia menziesii*), and pink fairy orchid (*Caladenia latifolia*).
Back Cover: Stimson's python (*Morelia stimsoni*)
Photo-Jiri Lochman



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