

REMINISCENCES II

CPN FIRSTS — PART 1

by Donald Schnell

In this the second of our somewhat nostalgic series I thought we would recall articles, projects, things done and so on, that more or less represent “firsts” in the CP literature. I will be concentrating again on the older volumes of our bulletin since most of our present subscribers are relatively new, and perhaps our older subscribers might like to be reminded of some interesting things that have happened in these old pages. As I mentioned once before, I have made it a habit to scan through all the past issues on at least a yearly basis and am continually surprised by some things I had forgotten we had done, or the origins of some projects we now more or less take for granted.

Now, first of all, there are many firsts in CPN over the years, and we cannot cover them all in this first article, hence the “Part 1” in the title. I have randomly selected a few to start with, and more will be discussed in later articles in this series at intervals. So, your first, or your favorite first done by someone else, will eventually be remembered. Have patience.

I guess the most obvious “first” to consider is the very existence of CPN itself. Again, it is one of those things many people might come to regard as just being there for all to enjoy, and that would be that. This is the first periodical that attempted to put as much information—including bibliography of articles published in widely scattered journals and magazines over the world—about our favorite topic between two covers on a regular basis. Since then, many other similar periodicals have come on to the scene; a few have lasted, many have fallen by the wayside. Most were and are rather similar to our earlier format and we have felt rather proudly that this was a compliment of sorts and welcomed them as

additional means of communication among us, which is what CPN was all about in the first place.

Joe and I who started the thing (and to this day we have never laid eyes on each other!) wanted to start some sort of organized way of combining all the individual communications each of us was involved in into one newsletter available to all who were interested. You can see what was originally conceived to be a four or so page mimeographed newsletter has become.

And another peculiarity of the whole thing was that the cart came before the horse. We had very early on a bulletin equivalent in extent and quality to the bulletins put out by other kinds of botanical organizations of formal character, but we were not organized. We now have the charter and by-laws, but no one wants to get elected, so in fact the cart remains before the horse.

One of our firsts goes way back to the end of 1972 (1-59) where Warren Stoutmire described what were probably the first attempts to germinate seed of various CP on sterile nutrient agar media, a process that was well established in the orchid world and which Warren had long used for his orchid work. He described the formula for a suitable agar medium, gave instructions on preparing seed and inoculating the medium, and he had good results with various species of *Sarracenia*, *Drosera*, *Byblis* (which he remarked might require a year or more to germinate), *Darlingtonia*, *Heliophora*, *Utricularia*, *Nepenthes* and *Pinguicula*. Quite an achievement so early on! Well, since then work in this area has mushroomed, particularly in the past 5-6 years. In this country, Bill Carroll and Ron Gagliardo have progressed to the point that tissue cultures as

well as seed germinations in sterile media are now offered on the market, thus contributing to a conservation effort as well as a ready supply of particularly desirable cultivars to collectors. Work in this area is also proceeding in other countries with very desirable results. I am not saying that all this would not have come about anyway, but I believe you read about it first in CPN.

One of our fondest efforts, because it was a product of genuine respect, affection and appreciation, involved a whole issue of CPN. This was the September, 1973 number (Vol. 2, No. 3) that was dedicated to the CP work of Dr. Edgar T. Wherry. In the botanical world at large, Dr. Wherry is most regarded for his work with ferns and the genus *Phlox*. But he also did some significant work covered in several journal papers on *Sarracenia* in the twenties and thirties. Dr. Wherry was always a very generous and patient man—he wrote letters and articles for CPN, he always answered his mail with thoughtful, personalized letters picked out on his typewriter, and he offered a perspective founded on years of botanizing that found him going into the field when he was in his nineties.

As an aside, I must mention his style, particularly his style of writing which seemed to be more individually expressed by many naturalists writing in the early part of the century. Another favorite example of mine is Frank Morton Jones. Somehow, they got all the scientific information into their papers and lectures and were not afraid of anecdotes and that personal touch that added that extra measure of what the writer and his work were all about. It was a pleasure reading them, as well as learning at the same time. Now, I can understand the well-intended purpose of modern requirements for a uniform structure for all scientific papers, the ease of being able to readily find what you need to find and expect to find in just the right paragraph of Introduction, Materials and Methods, Results, etc. That is nice. But it is also deadly dull. I get the distinct impression that given the

right microchips, software, and feeding in the facts, a computer could spit most modern papers out by the dozen, all perfect in organization, syntax, acceptable grammar and punctuation. That would save time for everyone, too. But there is something distinctly missing, that feeling of a flesh and blood author coming through, someone who has failed as well as succeeded in human terms in his life, someone who has been bitten by mosquitos and camped in the field and who sweats.

But back to the issue which we believe was the first entire issue of a periodical dedicated to Dr. Wherry. The front cover featured a beautiful montage pen and ink drawing by Dave Kutt who contributed so much fine artwork to our earlier issues. He worked from a rather average snapshot of Dr. Wherry, added some *Sarracenia*s in a greenhouse surrounding, and there it was created.

Inside, we had our usual features plus special articles including one by Dr. Wherry for the issue in which he furnished us with a brief biography of his professional life with emphasis on his work on *Sarracenia*. The article had “remembrances” in the title, so that in addition to a very neat capsulized summary of his concepts of *Sarracenia*, little bits of the man came through. Joe Mazrimas did a superb job summarizing Dr. Wherry’s formal papers on *Sarracenia*, and listed a bibliography at the end of his article. There were also articles on manually pollinating *Sarracenia* flowers and growing the plants. In keeping with the temper of the issue, Stephen Williams produced a very fine article saluting two other greats in our field—Sir John Burdon-Sanderson and Charles Darwin on the occasion of the centennial of the discovery of nerve-like activity in Venus’ flytrap. The article included quotes from letters between the two. This issue is well worth looking through again.

On to another first. When most of us who have broad interests in CP started in the field, we were naturally attracted to the larger or more spectacular of the

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species—*Sarracenia*, *Dionaea*, *Nepenthes*, glistening sundews. We kind of noticed but gave short shrift to such things as the *Pinguiculas* and *Utricularias*—we had read about them, they were kind of cute, that complex bladderwort trap described by Lloyd in his classic book was indeed complex and neat, and there we left it. Even professional botanists often threw up their hands in despair and most often referred to *Pinguicula* spp. and *Utricularia* spp. when mentioning the flora of a location and impatiently went on to the main purpose of their paper. All this was simply because there were no good botanical keys for arriving at the names of these plants in the field, and those keys published were fraught with errors. The problems with *Pinguicula* have been very capably handled by Caspar, Godfrey, Stripling and others in other publications. In the case of the bladderworts, Peter Taylor and Katsuhiko Kondo were particularly bringing some order to this area, but in widely scattered publications on individual species or species groups, es-

pecially as far as the North American species were concerned.

In short, we felt that a good, accurate, workable key usable in the field and based on above the ground flowers and other structures readily visible during the active growth period was needed for our North American species. Kondo obliged and we were able to publish the first such key, with illustrations, in CPN (Vol. 2, pp. 66-69). Peter Taylor provided additional clarification and commentary in another issue (Vol. 3, pp. 4-5). Together, this material was a landmark and still stands. I attribute my ability now to identify all North American *Utricularias* at a glance in the field to having used this excellent key over the years. It was in some demand after publication and we made offprints which were sold for cost of printing plus postage. Another article worth looking at again—let's not ignore those little masses of yellow flowers.

We will cover some more firsts in a later article. See you next issue on another subject.