

OF BARN SWALLOWS AND DROSERAS

by Owen Tallman
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In early May this year I returned from an early morning errand to find the greenhouse quite warm from the bright sun. I went in to see how everyone was doing and found that a barn swallow had gotten in and was sitting on top of one of the structural members.

When he saw me he took off towards the bright end of the greenhouse, and I saw that he had fallen for the light-window effect, for the way out was not towards the light of the sun but back through the dark shed on the north side of the greenhouse through which he had entered. The light end offered no escape; only the dark shed did. The shed functions as a kind of winter airlock and general workspace.

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I tried a few times to chase him out through the shed but he persistently swooped around my gesturing arms toward the light, consistently finding no way out there. I thought momentarily of the similarity between this situation and that of a flying insect inside a window, or inside the hood of a *Sarracenia minor*. In the house, I could either open the window or swat the bug. Here, as inside a pitcher plant, there was only one way out. It did not help me to try to imagine what I would do inside a pitcher plant, so I forgot about it and went outside where I found two large pieces of cardboard. I thought with these I could make it clear to the bird what he had to do by putting a barrier up wherever he tried to fly past me in the wrong direction.

Now this greenhouse is set up in several levels, each consisting of a pair of rows of plastic flats (or trays) about 12" x 24", suspended on wooden frames with a walkway in between. Chasing this poor bird, who eyed me in terror and puffed and panted in the heat, I was standing on the frame/bench structure about three feet off the ground, waving my cardboard shields above my head so that I blocked the walkway with my body and the passage above my head with the cardboards. Faced with this the bird plunged headlong into a flat of about 70 rather large narrow-leaf *Drosera capensis* and stopped.

I was about to grab him when I realized that he wasn't going anywhere. He had landed all right, with his wings spread, but that was what did it--the combined sticking power or this army of sundews had got him wing, foot and tail. If he thought these plants would provide a landing platform he misjudged, though he was acting in panic. I watched him struggling for a few moments to be certain that he was caught then picked him up, slippery and tacky, and tossed him out the door. He flew straight away.

I suppose that I might be accused of missing an opportunity to document the animal-trapping and digesting ability of these large South African sundews, but it was my fault the bird got stuck, and in fact the whole episode arose from my interference, since in all the years the swallows had lived in these buildings they'd had no reason to expect to end up in a greenhouse/trap after flying into a dark shed.

I don't know if the bird could have escaped, but having seen similar groups of plants in inadvertent cooperation capture and literally draw and quarter very large moths, I had no inclination to test the idea. Besides, I couldn't see myself explaining with any aplomb the feathery remains on this group of plants to visitors. People have enough strange ideas about CP as it is.

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CARNIVOROUS PLANT COMPANIES

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There are many CP companies, which vary greatly in quality, price, etc. I have received plants and catalogs from some of these companies, and here are my reactions.

World Insectivorous Plants (Rt. 1, Box 338S, Arroyo Grande, CA 93420). This company is one of the best. The plants are all greenhouse grown, which lessens the strain on the plants in their natural environment. All the plants are very healthy and are rather mature (i.e. no seedlings). Many are blooming or ready to. They are also very prompt in sending the plants. The prices are very good, much better than for most plants taken from the wild. They carry *Sarracenia* as well as the plants mentioned in CPN VI(1):20. Their selection is very large.