

Drosera praefolia

by

Robert Gibson, P.O. Box 287, Penrith,
N.S.W., 2750, AUSTRALIA

Drosera praefolia is a hysteroanthous, rosetted tuberous *Drosera* endemic to a small area in South Australia. It is an attractive, and easily grown species which has recently been re-instated as a separate species, and has formerly been classified as a variety or subspecies of *D. whittakeri* (Bates, 1991).

In April 1992 I had the good fortune to see this species in the wild not far from Adelaide. Several hundred plants grew in natural woodland on a south-facing slope above a small intermittent creek with other geophytes. Many plants were flowering, which helped in locating the plants. The most distinctive feature of *D. praefolia* is that it flowers before the foliage has developed (i.e. a hysteroanthous habit), which is shared with only one other species, *D. zonaria*, from south-west Western Australia (Lowrie, 1987). The basal rosette develops on the side of the stolon, at the base of the inflorescence and grows rapidly so that by the middle of May the fully grown leaves lie flat on the ground covering many ripening fruit.

Another distinctive feature is that the tuber is white, rather than red, and therefore differs from both subspecies of *D. whittakeri*. Other differences are outlined in Bates (1991) and Lowrie (1989).

I collected two mature plants which have grown successfully in cultivation and have allowed me to observe this species throughout its growing season. The red juvenile inflorescence emerges in late March and grows rapidly. The first flower opens within two weeks and the last in the middle of May. Five to twenty



Fig. 1 — *Drosera praefolia*. A plant at the beginning of the flowering season in mid-April. The pedicels, reflexed sepals and immature flowers are an attractive coppery-red to olive-green colour. The foliage bud is just starting to develop but is not visible. Photo by Robert Gibson.



Fig. 2 — *Drosera praefolia*. The same plant in late May. Note that the flowers are prostrate in fruit and are variably covered by the rapidly forming rosette. Photo by Robert Gibson.

five flowers are born singularly on pedicels 3 to 4 cm long; these lengthen after the flower closes. Each flower lasts only a day and are open from 9:30 am to approximately 4 pm, but the white petals may close later in warmer conditions. The petals smell of nectar, although the flower produces none, which is only detectable (to the human nose) within 10 cm of the open

flower. The scented reflective-white petals are highly visible on the woodland floor and are probably visited by small flies, bees or moths. Each flower becomes prostrate in fruit, and the spherical seeds are shed in June. Non-flowering plants tend to emerge above-ground a few days later than flowering plants.

The basal rosette starts as a compact red bud at the base of one side of the inflorescence and it begins to open in early May, often before the last flowers have opened. From this point the leaves quickly grow to form a rosette to 50 mm diameter. The leaves are paddle-shaped, to 30 mm long by 12 mm wide with a distinctive, shallowly caniculate petiole to 10 mm long by 2 mm wide. The rounded edge of each leaf appears serrated due to the alternately arranged peripheral down-pointing retentive glands. The leaves have some ability to fold over larger prey and are produced until early July. Those leaves produced from mid-June are on shortened petioles and tend to fill in the gaps in the rosette centre. The leaves grow to 40 mm long, by 16 mm wide, when flowering has finished, and form an attractive rosette to 80 mm diameter. The plants remain bedewed until early September and dies down in late September or early October depending upon soil moisture.

This species grows well in 10-20 cm diameter plastic pots in a mix of approximately 25% peat moss and 75% quartz sand which are kept in a sunny position. The pots are stood in a tray containing water from April to September and also given an occasional sprinkle of water over summer. At present it appears that it can only be propagated from seed, which germinates the following winter (in cultivation). It is necessary to cross-pollinate flowers from separate plants to produce seed. Flowering may be enhanced by fertilizing the plants with dilute potassium sulphate during the growing season.

Daughter rosettes form at the base of the parent plant. From my limited experience, these emanate from the apices of the often paired scapes, and form if no flower is fertilised.

Drosera praefolia is an attractive, large rosetted tuberous sundew which can be grown successfully under the same conditions as for other tuberous species. Its hysteranthous habit, attractive white-petalled flowers and leaves makes it an asset in any carnivorous plant collection.

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