

## THE SAVAGE GARDEN: “THE CREATION AND EARLY EVOLUTION OF CPN”

PETER D’AMATO • California Carnivores • 2833 Old Gravenstein Hwy • Sebastopol, California  
95472 • USA • califcarn@aol.com

Keywords: biography: Don Schnell, Joe Mazrimas

“I have been wondering about developing a little mimeographed newsletter dealing with carnivorous plants to be compiled and mailed quarterly.”

Thus wrote Don Schnell to Joe Mazrimas on January 23, 1970. He continued: “This could really develop into a clearing house of information, hints, sources, and summary of interesting work being done. One of the key features would be a bibliography with a brief summary and critique of each paper. Also, each subscriber could send in a few paragraphs of interest, although we could not print long papers. I have seen this done in other fields and the results seem to be gratifying. Let me know what you think.”

Over a year and a half later, on August 27, 1971, Don and Joe brought up this idea once again. “The need for some sort of organization does keep cropping up in my head, too,” Don wrote. “It would be an awful lot of work, but it keeps bugging me.” He mentions a ten-year-old newsletter called “Bat Research News” put out by the “bat people,” a format he thought they could emulate. It was shortly thereafter that CPN was born, and at times Joe and Don nearly went batty!

\* \* \*



Figure 1: Joe Mazrimas (left) and Don Schnell (right) in 1999.

On November 15, 1971, Joe sent a sample introductory newsletter to Don, called “Amphora,” which was Greek for “jug or pitcher.” A few days later, Don wrote back, suggesting a more obvious title “Carnivorous Plant News,” which could also be abbreviated into CPN. Joe agreed. It should be extremely amusing to the current editors of CPN to read about Don and Joe’s early headaches getting the first announcement of their publication off the ground. This was a time before common Xerox machines, computers, and email.

On January 23, 1972, Don wrote, “It seems we better get the CPN going. I contacted a local office supply store that does mimeograph work on the side. They can give us a hundred copies of our initial one-page newsletter for \$1.84 ... I will bear the printing cost, I think that is about as reasonable as we will find until we get fancy later on perhaps and go to offset if the thing gets big... My calculations indicate that a four sheet newsletter printed on both sides would cost 12

cents apiece to print. Mailing is 8 cents more, thus 20 cents per CPN on the way to the subscriber.” They decided to charge an annual subscription rate of \$1.00 in North America, and \$2.00 for foreign subscriptions. The extra pennies would pay for things like staples.

\* \* \*

The first time Joe, who lived in northern California, and Don, who lived then in Atlanta but later moved to North Carolina, contacted each other was in June, 1968. Don heard that Joe collected carnivorous plants from Warren Stoutamire, a botanist at the University of Akron in Ohio, and wrote Joe a letter introducing himself. Thus began a long history of letter writing, trading plants, and gossip. By 1972, they had a small circle of carnivorous plant enthusiasts, including notables at the time like Ritchie Bell at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

To get out word of the newly germinating CPN, they printed 300 copies and sent them to the few enthusiasts known personally to them, plus copies to the authors of CP research articles found in botanical publications, university botany departments, botanical gardens, and a few hobbyists they had been in contact with. Don sent 200 of the announcement issues through the eastern half of North America plus Europe and South Africa. Joe sent 100 throughout western America, plus Australia and Asia. Don wrote to Joe on February 8, 1972, “I might even have included Howard Hughes if I was certain he still existed.” They planned the first issue for that April.

There were numerous annoying little problems they had to resolve before subscriptions came in. Don’s secretary enthusiastically did all the typewriting. (“She doesn’t have THAT much to do in the office, but don’t tell her that!”) Addresses of subscribers were kept on index cards and each new subscription had four address labels made so they would know when each annual subscription ended. At first, no photos, but some line drawings were used.

On February 25, 1972, Don wrote, “So far, I have received only one reply to our mass mailing, besides Ritchie Bell and Warren, three all together.” He was hoping for 10 to 15 more.

Ritchie Bell offered use of the university’s printing department, which saved time and several pennies per issue. By March 7, Don wrote, “I think CPN is catching on, I received two more subscriptions Monday, one from Kew Gardens and one from Canada.” By March 11, they had 16 subscriptions. “In a very few years we’ll have hundreds.”

Ironically, Katsuhiko Kondo was doing research at UNC-Chapel Hill at this time, working with Ritchie Bell. Katsu was the son of Masahiro Kondo, and both were CP enthusiasts. Katsu’s book “Carnivorous Plants” was scheduled to be published in Japan in 1974, and ten years later, father and son’s “Carnivorous Plants in Color” would be very popular, especially for its many photos of rare CP at the time. It was Katsu who designed the lovely original masthead illustration of a cobra plant, hooded pitcher plant, Venus flytrap and thread-leaved sundew with the bold title “Carnivorous Plant Newsletter.”

Joe and Don were astounded when they found out Japan had an “Insectivorous Plant Society” since 1949, and at the time had 300 members! They had been publishing their own newsletter for twenty-three years!

Katsu announced the new CPN in the Japanese newsletter, and Don and Joe were quite befuddled when subscriptions poured in, but all the correspondence and addresses were in un-readable (to them) Japanese. They resolved this by sending a bulk mailing to Japan’s society, who then distributed them to their members.

\* \* \*

The first issue of the Carnivorous Plant Newsletter was published on schedule in April, 1972. It was 15 pages long. There were about 25 subscribers. After an introductory “Editors’ Corner” welcoming everyone and mentioning future plans, the “New Subscribers” section gave their names, addresses, and a few sentences about their interests in CP. Most were teachers and researchers from university botany departments, but also members from public gardens and businesses subscribed, such as Kew Gardens in England, Longwood Gardens in Pennsylvania, and the Carolina Biological Supply Company. There were very few “hobbyists” at this time. Four informative articles appeared in the first issue. Warren Stoutamire wrote about monitoring salts in soil and water, Joe wrote about *Drosophyllum* and its difficulties, plus a piece on *Chrysamphora* (*Darlingtonia*), and Don wrote about *Sarracenia oreophila*. The rest of the issue was a “catch-up” on recently published scientific literature and a brief review of Rica Erickson’s 1968 book “Plants of Prey,” about Australian CP.

By June 29, just as the second issue in July was published, CPN had over 100 subscribers, nearly half from Japan. The excitement also had its stress. Good doctor that he is, Don told Joe to “take your vitamins and get plenty of rest.” The second issue added the ever popular “News and Views” section, plus a list of a dozen carnivorous plant suppliers, all but one in the United States.

\* \* \*

For anyone who has never sat down with either hard copies of CPN’s early years or read them on-line in the Society’s archives on its website, you’re missing out on hours of engrossing, informative history that can become quite addictive. So many subjects were covered so rapidly as the subscriber base expanded from the U.S., Europe, and Japan to include growers in Australia and South Africa, early CP enthusiasts at the time had their brains nearly explode (not to mention their greenhouses, terrariums, and bog gardens). The modern phase of knowledge about these incredible plants had begun, and we owe it all to Don Schnell and Joe Mazrimas.

\* \* \*

Joe Mazrimas was born in Boston in 1937, and graduated from Boston College 21 years later. He moved to California “in search of gold!” and graduated in 1963 with an M.S. in Biochemistry from the University of California in Davis. It was around this time two things happened that would change his life. He killed a couple of Venus flytraps bought in a local nursery with Davis’ notoriously hard tap water, and met and married his wife Kathy. In the library, Joe found out some basic information on how to keep flytraps alive. He worked at UC Davis a few years, then transferred to the Lawrence Livermore Laboratory east of San Francisco. He worked “with DNA, proteins, lipids as well as synthesized peptides” for 35 years. He retired in 1997. He and Kathy have two kids and four grandchildren, all of whom have black thumbs!

I first met Joe in 1984 when I displayed plants in my collection at the San Francisco Plant and Flower Show. There were a handful of CP growers in the Bay Area at the time, which we later organized into the Bay Area Carnivorous Plant Society. I had been growing CP since junior high school but had only discovered CPN a few years before meeting Joe. It was a humbling experience hanging out and trading plants with one of the creators of CPN. I went on several fun field trips with Joe and his best buddy Larry Logateta. I have always found Joe to be child-like in his joy and enthusiasm growing carnivorous plants, completely unpretentious, and always willing to share his encyclopedic knowledge, especially about the early days of the modern hobby. Shortly after his retirement he and Kathy drove up to Sonoma County where I live in a resort town to show off their huge RV, which

they have used to explore CP sites from California to Maine. His stories of those trips are delightful. Naturally, Joe is still active in BACPS and maintains a huge collection. He's won many awards for his plants.

\* \* \*

Don Schnell was born in 1936 and raised in Toledo, Ohio. His dad worked for the railroad, and seeing young Don's interest in chemistry, zoology, and botany, steered him into medicine. In college, Don began to explore local bogs looking for CP, and he graduated with a medical degree from Ohio State and moved on into pathology. He spent several years as a pathologist in the Army, and was happy to be finally stationed at Ft. McPherson in Georgia, where he spent most weekends looking for CP in the southern savannahs.

(Ironically, a middle-aged guy came into my nursery, California Carnivores, in the 1990's and enthusiastically recalled a doctor when he was in the Army who would take soldiers on field trips to see CP. I held up a copy of "Carnivorous Plants of the United States and Canada" and exclaimed, "You mean Doctor Don!?" The guy freaked out!)

After the Army, Don got a job as a pathologist in a small civilian hospital in North Carolina, where he met his wife Brenda, a lab technician. They have two daughters, also in the medical field, and a few grandkids who get a kick out of Don's CP collection. Don's "other hobby" is outdoor model railroads. He loves his trains. He finally retired only three years ago ("I should have done it ten years ago!")

I have a few memorable experiences with "Dr. Don," as I call him. He first contacted me in the late 1980's looking for a few plants like *Drosera regia*. In return, he sent me **boxes** of *Sarracenia*, many type-specimens, from his collection. All of these plants are part of California Carnivores' stock and display collection. He also sent me all of his published botanical papers.

A funny memory was my first time meeting him at a presentation I did at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill. I had no idea what Dr. Don even looked like, but Marie Baumgartl, who owned "Marie's Orchids and Carnivorous Plants" in Florida back in the 80's and 90's, warned me, "He looks like a handsome military drill sergeant!"

When he first shook my hand, I think I winced and my knees buckled. This was the man who taught me the word "salubrious." I also remember Don's laughter in the audience at my CP jokes.

Needless to say, Don is the author of the two editions of "Carnivorous Plants of the United States and Canada" (1976, 2002). But he's not done yet. He is working with Stewart McPherson on a two volume monograph of Sarraceniaceae, due to be released soon.

After years of editing CPN, it is ironic Joe and Don never met in person until the first ICPS convention in Atlanta in 1997. I witnessed it. It was a joyous event.

\* \* \*

Thanks to Don and Joe for helping me with this article, with particular appreciation to Joe, who gave me a stack Don's old typewritten letters! Thanks also to Liz Brown for technical assistance (typing).

PDFs of all issues of CPN from 1972 to present are available to ICPS members at <http://icps.clubexpress.com>. Individual articles printed in CPN are publicly available at <http://www.carnivorousplants.org/cpn/Search.php>.