

BOOK REVIEW

by Marcel van den Broek • marcel@carnivorousplants.org

Bailey, T., and McPherson, S. 2013. *Dionaea* The Venus's Flytrap. Redfern Natural History Productions Ltd. 448 p. ISBN 978-1-908787-10-1.

Among the recent avalanche of books on carnivorous plants is this book that is completely dedicated to just one plant, the Venus's Flytrap. The authors, Tim Bailey and Stewart McPherson, are two well-known carnivorous plant enthusiasts. This review is my impression of the book, while comparing it to Tim Bailey's previous work on this species: *Miraculum Naturae: Venus's Flytrap* (Bailey 2008).

This new book displays the well known Redfern quality in being glossy, full of high quality color photographs and above all, thick/heavy. The content is largely comparable to Bailey's *Miraculum Naturae*, something the current authors readily acknowledge. It was their intent to produce an improved version of Bailey's book and to add new material as well. In this they undoubtedly succeeded. Bailey's original book was a private publication on a tight budget and the difference with this new book shows. A hard cover, beautiful full color photographs on high quality paper, and a much clearer print are the first things that are noticeable in a comparison.

The book starts with a general introduction to carnivorous plants, like every other Redfern book, as this might be your first book on carnivorous plants. If not, just skip this section as it is just about the same as in all other Redfern books, though somewhat shorter.

Next, the book has a somewhat lengthy history lesson. If you are interested in the botanical history of plants you will love it, but for the average reader 60 pages of history on a single plant might be a bit too much. The text is just about the same as in *Miraculum Naturae*, but here the quality of print and the use of color actually improves on the earlier publication because details on pictures of old letters are much more discernible. Biographies of the historically important people in *Dionaea*'s history are found in the back of the book for those who want yet a little more history.

Next is a pretty good text on such things as growth cycle, cultivation, and pests and diseases. The section on the conservational status of *Dionaea* is very clear, rating remaining populations on survivability with nice maps that show a depressing pattern of decline.

Up to this point, this book is a natural history lesson combined with a reasonably good overview on *Dionaea*, but not something that couldn't be found elsewhere. The real value of this book comes in the cultivar section where many of the commonly grown variations of *Dionaea* are described, including all officially registered cultivar names as of the date of print. For many of the plant names that had not yet been registered, this is the first time anyone has made a formal description of these plants. These descriptions, combined with the high quality pictures that accompany the text, make this a valuable publication for those who grow these plants.

In conclusion, I can only state that this is a book that displays what might be a new course for books by Redfern/McPherson. It straddles the fence between a scientific monograph and a popular horticultural book, thus reaching out to two very different types of readers. As with all fence sitters, both communities of readers will have some issues with this book as it tries to be both, but isn't perfect for either side. However, the clear lay out of the book makes it easy to skip sections that one might find to be less interesting and the (as usual) friendly price makes the book worthwhile to both groups. This is a book along the same lines as that other (excellent) Redfern publication, *Aldrovanda: The Waterwheel Plant* by Adam Cross (2012).

References:

Bailey, T.S. 2008. *Miraculum Naturae: Venus's Flytrap*. Trafford Publishing: Bloomington, IN. 280 p.
Cross, A. 2012. *Aldrovanda: The Waterwheel Plant*. Redfern Natural History Productions: Dorset, UK. 249 p.