

BUTTERFLIES LOVE *SARRACENIA*

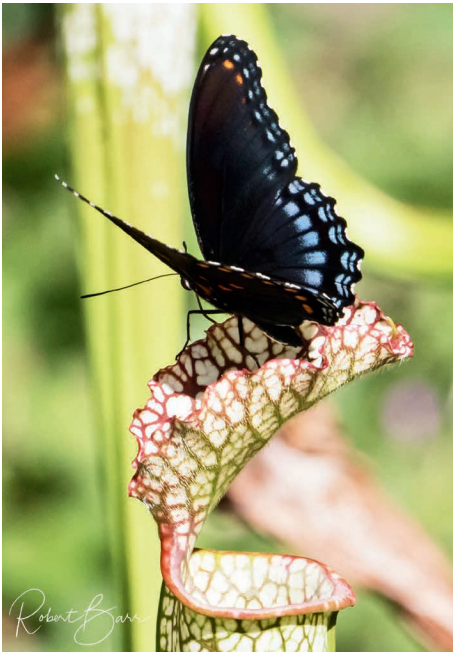
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My interest in “meat eating” plants began in the mid-1950’s when as a typical six-year-old I snatched my older brother’s DC Comics to read about Superman, Batman, and all the lesser gods within that pantheon. Of no less fascination to my eager eyes were the back pages of those monthly chronicles where mail order items resided that were every bit as fantastic to a youngster’s vivid imagination as the feats of super-human derring-do performed by the heroic champions. For mere pennies, ... okay, for a few bucks, one could order x-ray glasses or ventriloquism lessons or sea monkeys (later revealed to be brine shrimp that didn’t look a thing like monkeys) or, best of all, huge man-eating, meat-eating plants with the other worldly name of Venus Fly Traps! Over the next few years I ordered and killed several of those less-than-threatening little plants that had been ripped from their native environments in North Carolina and fed into the meat grinder that was mail-order sales in that day and age.

Fast forward several decades to find me retired and with the free time to revisit some of those interests we all have filed away in the folder “When I have enough time, I’m going to...”. At the beginning of the second decade of this still-new millennium I began to devote an adult’s level of interest to the carnivorous plants native to my home state of Georgia and the region. I began by attending a full day workshop just north of Atlanta at the Chattahoochee Nature Center conducted by Henning von Schmeling on pitcher plants of the Southeastern United States. I couldn’t have received a higher voltage jump start for my engine than he provided. Returning home with a self-made container bog



This photo was put together for use in presentations to garden clubs, civic groups, Master Gardener chapters, etc., entitled “A Child’s Garden of Carnivorous Pitcher Plants” to illustrate the beauty and diversity of the genus *Sarracenia*. I failed to notice during the photography session that a Gulf Fritillary butterfly (*Agraulis vanillae*) had photo-bombed me at the upper right of the image. Butterflies truly love *Sarracenia*!



Common along the margins of woods throughout Georgia, Red-Spotted Purples (*Limenitis arthemis astyanax*) spend time each Spring and Summer. Some of that quality time is spent perched atop *S. leucophylla* sampling the sugary lures exuded by the pitchers to lead smaller prey to their doom. Their striking colors have evolved to mimic the toxic Pipevine Swallowtail butterfly. The *S. leucophylla* seen here was grown from seed harvested a few hundred kilometers to the southwest in Baldwin County, Alabama, and purchased by the author from the ICPS Seed Bank five years ago.

replete with four species of *Sarracenia* and a gnawing hunger to make up for so much lost time, I ordered books on carnivorous plants, I visited websites, I viewed streaming videos, I emailed collectors and vendors, I visited bogs in Alabama, Georgia, and north Florida, I joined ICPS, I did all the things that many of you who are reading this article have quite likely done.

I now have more cp's (I picked up some jargon along the way as well), primarily of the genus *Sarracenia*, than I have room to accommodate; nevertheless, I continue to acquire more. Every addict continues to crave a stronger and stronger fix, more and more of the stuff that dreams are made of, greater doses of the magic elixir. It is an addiction with the acronym CPAS (Carnivorous Plant Acquisition Syndrome). I am one happy cp junkie.

But enough about me. I want to offer an interesting tidbit to a readership composed almost entirely of more erudite, formally educated, well informed, and more experienced individuals than I on the subject matter at hand: an observation I have made in the past decade regarding an ongoing relationship between members of the genus *Sarracenia* and the order *Lepidoptera*. My home lies in the Georgia Piedmont geologic region of the USA, an easy hour's drive west from Atlanta toward Alabama. The location, while devoid of *Sarracenia* (that I know of), allows me to enjoy the abundance of sites west into Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana, and northeast into the Carolinas, and south throughout the Georgia coastal plain (and the Okefenokee Swamp!), and into the Florida Panhandle. As I became familiar with the ideal situation of my habitation, I felt



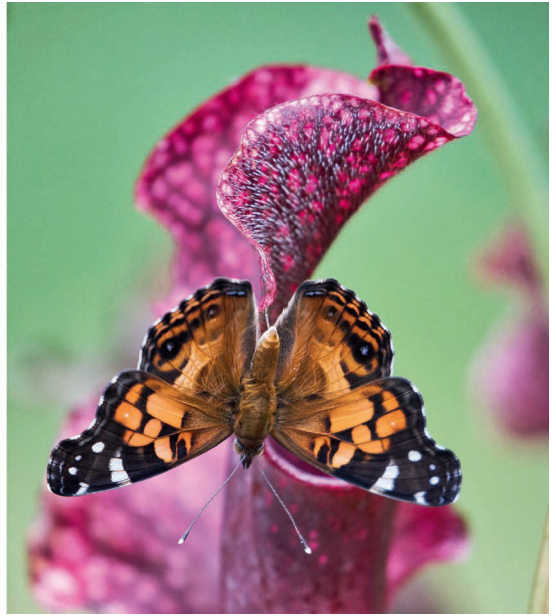
Eastern Tiger Swallowtails (*Papilio glaucus*) are among the largest, most striking, and most often seen butterflies in the Georgia Piedmont region. Accordingly, they are one of the most frequently observed species visiting pitchers in the author's bog gardens to sample the nectar lures on a variety of *Sarracenia* species. None of the species observed visiting pitchers seemed to evince a preference for one *Sarracenia* species over another; however, none have been observed on any of the decumbent species of *Sarracenia*.

not unlike the proverbial blind dog in the butcher shop! So many wonderful things to sample! What to do first?

But back to my interesting observation. In the decade that I have been afflicted with CPAS, I have noticed an occurrence that, while I make no claim to its being unique to my location or that I am the first to take note of it, I have not come across any other accounts of it in this periodical or

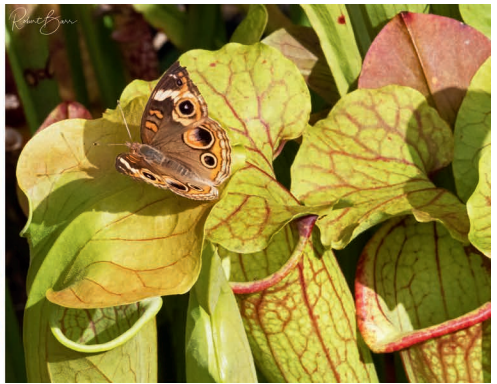


Cloudless Sulphur butterflies (*Phoebis sennae*) can be seen throughout the warm months, but their numbers swell through August into September as they migrate southward for the winter. These individuals have found the nectar line along the ridge of a *S. minor* 'Okee Giant' obtained from a California grower. It has reached a height of 50 cm growing outdoors here in USDA Hardiness Zone 7b. Winter patterns in this locale tend to be erratic with several mild winters having lows no colder than about -4°C followed by a severe winter with minus double digit lows and a string of days when the thermometer fails to climb above the freezing mark. Within any given winter, weeks of intermittent freezing temperatures at night can be followed by a "February thaw" with balmy days above 15°C or even above 20°C only to be followed by another string of below freezing days and nights.



A Gulf Fritillary (*Agraulis vanillae*) sits atop *Sarracenia minor* (left); *Sarracenia* 'Judith Hindle' is an ideal plant to select for beginning hobbyists. Intense color and ease of cultivation make them a favorite for most collectors. Here an American Painted Lady (*Vanessa viginensis*) enjoys sweetness from the lip of Judith (right).

any of the books I have read. I have coined the term “Unintended Friends with Benefits who Offer Little or Nothing of Benefit in Return but at least do no Damage and look really Pretty in the Process” to describe the activity. Almost every species of butterfly commonly found in my part of the world feeds regularly on the “nectar” bait secreted by the *Sarracenia* in my bog gardens. As I speak



The wings of an American Painted Lady conform perfectly with the arc formed by the lid of *S. 'Judith Hindle'* (left). The sturdy 60 cm pitchers of this *Sarracenia flava* × *leucophylla* hybrid provide a platform on which a Common Buckeye (*Junonia coenia*) rests (right).



A Silver-spotted Skipper (*Epargyreus clarus*) samples the sweetness on the lid of *Sarracenia flava* (top left), while another skipper feeds along the top of *Sarracenia* × *excellens* (top right). Although small enough to easily fall prey to the pitchers, the author has never witnessed any of these small butterflies fall victim to *Sarracenia* in his garden. The only butterfly to have ever been seen to become prey was an American Painted Lady that slipped into the pitcher of a large *Sarracenia leucophylla* (left).

to garden clubs, Master Gardener groups, Georgia Native Plant Chapters, school groups, and total strangers who I am able to corner in stores or on sidewalks about the pleasure to be derived from adding winter hardy *Sarracenia* to their home garden roster, I stress the *Sarracenia*'s ability to attract the beauty of butterflies into their realms. While we all know that *Sarracenia* are carnivorous, and butterflies would certainly be on their menu, the butterfly's large wingspan precludes all but the smallest from becoming dinner while they are enjoying their nectar dessert.

I hope the readership of our own ICPS Newsletter might enjoy a view of some of the pairings that I have recorded.