

STEVE CLEMESHA (1942 - 2018) – THE LIFE OF A PLANT ENTHUSIAST

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Steve Clemesha (Fig 1) was born in Sydney and developed an interest in botany at an early age. By 9 or 10 he began to grow a collection of native orchids at the family home in North Strathfield. He also began to take an interest in the plants that grew with orchids, both in the wild and in cultivation, and this interest was with him for life.

During his training as a primary school teacher he learnt of North American pitcher plants, which were not grown in Australia at the time. In 1961 Steve received *Sarracenia* seed from Warren Stoutamire. By 1968 Steve's collection included several *Darlingtonia*, a few species and hybrids of *Sarracenia*, and some species of *Drosera*. In 1968 Steve began to correspond with Joe Mazrimas, and through which Steve's collection of carnivorous plants, particularly *Sarracenia*, became far more diverse. Steve was interested in unusual forms of pitcher plants, and he began to make his own hybrids (Clemesha 1991).

In 1976 Steve and his family moved to a five-acre property at Emerald Beach, near Coffs Harbour, where they built their home. Here Steve made several greenhouses, shade houses, and garden beds for his already large and diverse plant collection, that included ferns, bulbs and orchids. The property had a dam, on which Steve grew his *Sarracenia* collection in floating polystyrene boxes (Fig. 2).



Figure 1: Steve Clemesha on 28 May 2017.



Figure 2: Some of Steve's floating *Sarracenia* collection on 28 May 2017.



Figure 3: A plant of *Drosera anglica* × *filiformis* var. *tracyi* (left); *Sarracenia flava* var. *rubricorpora* × *alata* var. *rubrioperculata* (right).

Steve undertook fieldwork, experimented on growing and propagating plants, created many novel hybrids, wrote numerous articles for the Carnivorous Plant Newsletter, and was a prolific and generous correspondent. Steve was also a passionate conservationist and used his botanical expertise to help argue successfully for the protection of local remnants of native vegetation. Some of his many other achievements include:

- Creating the three-fold informal classification of the *Drosera binata* complex (Clemesha 1972a).
- Preserving *Sarracenia* from populations that have subsequently become extinct.
- Developing the rhizome-notching technique for propagating *Sarracenia* (Slack 1986: pp. 66-67).
- Creating a hybrid between *Drosera anglica* × *filiformis* var. *tracyi* that it is now in collections in different parts of the World (D’Amato 2015) (Fig. 3 left).

Steve’s *Sarracenia* hybridization program included at least three different themes: (1) all-red pitcher plants; (2) hairy pitcher plants (particularly using hairy plants of *S. leucophylla* that Steve received from Bruce Pierson); and (3) all-green pitcher plants. Over more than 50 years Steve produced many amazing hybrids, as recognized by Slack (1986: pp. 80-81). Some of the most notable plants include a wonderful form of *S. flava* var. *rubricorpora* × *alata* var. *rubrioperculata* (Fig. 3 right), lurid lime green plants of *S. purpurea* f. *heterophylla* × *rubra* ssp. *jonesii* var. *viridescens*, many different forms of *S. × catesbaei* and *S. × moorei* using different forms of both parental species, and *S. × wrigleyana*.

Sadly, Steve passed away on 17 August 2018. He was 76. He is survived by his wife, Pauline, five children and 13 grandchildren. His plants are grown by many people around the World, and work has commenced on a public display of some of his *Sarracenia* at the North Coast Regional Botanic Garden in Coffs Harbour. His cultivation and propagation techniques have been incorporated into widely accepted best practice, and his ideas for hybridizing *Sarracenia* and the informal names for

the *Drosera binata* complex continue to be used. In short, he has made an on-going legacy. Farewell Steve, you are missed.

Acknowledgements: I thank Steve for his friendship and the knowledge he shared over 30+ years of correspondence. I also thank Pauline for her help and patience as we have been rehousing Steve's *Sarracenia* collection into new homes and establishing a core of collection of his most outstanding plants.

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