

BOOK REVIEW

Liu, A., and DiPietro, D. 2020. *Drosera* of the New Jersey Pinelands. Softcover, 156 + XIV pp., ISBN: 13-978-1889878-56-0.

Brit Press. \$35 + shipping, from <https://shop.brit.org/>

Reviewed by Barry Rice

Many many years ago, a friend in New York City was getting married, and asked me to serve as his best man. What an honor! I travelled across the country, to New York City for the event.

After the wedding, a long string of parties was scheduled. But instead of attending them, I befuddled (and no doubt offended) my friend's family when I packed my rental car and raced out of the city!

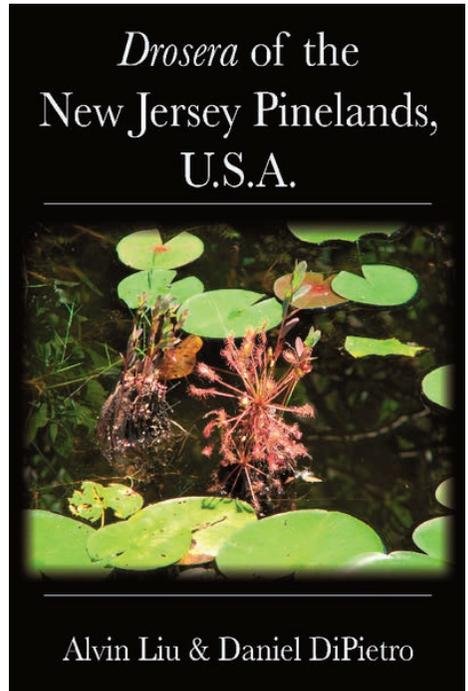
Why would I do such a thing? Because, of course, I was within striking distance of the New Jersey Pine Barrens! And so, midmorning the day after the wedding (while my cohorts were sleeping off hangovers) I was in the Barrens, in stunned ecstatic shock and delight, staring at the first carnivorous plants I had ever seen in the wild.

Really—that's the story of my first. And it is why I have a special, emotional connection to the New Jersey Pine Barrens. It also gives context to why I was thrilled to learn that a carnivorous plant book had been written about the Barrens. But I was also concerned...would it do the Barrens justice?

I am happy to say it does!

If you don't know, the New Jersey Pine Barrens (which is more or less interchangeably referred to as the New Jersey Pinelands National Reserve), is a large region spanning several counties in New Jersey. This Atlantic Coastal Pine Barrens ecoregion is characterized by sandy, nutrient poor soils and frequent fires. This results in stunted, dwarf forests of *Pinus rigida* (pitch pine) and *Quercus marilandica* (blackjack oak), often not much taller than a human. The streams flow slowly, stained deep brown with acidic tannins. The harsh conditions made human exploitation of the land difficult, hence the "barrens," and it was a magnet (or refuge) to the poor, desperate, and otherwise marginalized segments of society. Folks who live in the region are to this day sometimes called "pineys," a name once derogatory, but now more or less adopted as a badge of local pride. And of course, no thumbnail sketch of the region is complete without an aside to the Jersey Devil, which is a local variant of bigfoot, although strongly flavored with Christian occultism.

Before I dig into the book's substance, let's talk about its presentation. This is a quality softcover printed on good paper with clean typography. The many images (most in color) are of excellent



quality, albeit not printed glossy (which I think would have improved their value some). The book's layout is well done, and the writing is smooth and easy. In other words, the things that you should not notice, do not make themselves be noticed—and that is perfect.

This lovely little volume is focused on one slender topic...the *Drosera* of the Pine Barrens. There are only three species in this range—*Drosera rotundifolia*, *Drosera intermedia*, and *Drosera filiformis*—so the scope of the work isn't too large. In fact, you may wonder if you really need to buy this book, considering its narrow scope. Oh, yes, yes you do. The authors bring to this topic a special expertise earned from hours in the field, studying these plants in a variety of settings and times of the year. And it is so interesting to read their observations. These three species have somewhat overlapping, somewhat distinct preferred microhabitats, and a careful reading of this book will give you a great deal of valuable insight.

The authors also illustrate some lesser known characteristics of the individual species. Did you know about the deep-red-flower variant of *Drosera filiformis*? (I didn't!) They also add a great deal of information and insight as to the mysterious stem-forming expression of *Drosera intermedia*, which is so remarkable especially in New Jersey. And the authors also spend some valuable page spaces discussing the characters of *Drosera* in dormancy—a topic usually overlooked.

Equally as interesting as the species, are the hybrids. We know of two hybrids in the Barrens—*Drosera* × *hybrida* and *Drosera* × *eloisiana* (formerly, *D.* × *beleziana*). These are treated in detail, so you have an excellent exploration of what we know about them here in one place.

Simply said, if you have an interest in *Drosera*, you have an interest in this book. Buy it before it goes out of print!

If I felt this book had any deficits, it is that I would like to see the authors expand the work. And here is short list of things to add (perhaps, we might hope, in a second edition?):

- 1) Give us some understanding of why the Pine Barrens exist? What is the origin of its unique hydrology, geology, and ecology?
- 2) Perhaps some keys would be useful, especially for those who are trying to muddle out hybrids from pure species?
- 3) Finally, of course, how about throwing in the *Sarracenia* and *Utricularia* of the Barrens? Finish off the entire group of carnivores!

The authors of this book deserve a huge congratulations for their work, which—now it was completed—seems like it was surely long overdue!



A garden's chronicle

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