

CAPTIVATED: THE ALLURE OF CARNIVOROUS PLANTS

A NON-PROFIT DOCUMENTARY FILM

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I'm a forensic biologist, amateur filmmaker and the owner of a registered carnivorous plant nursery in New York City. In 2015, I decided that my next film project would be a documentary, merging my passion for filmmaking with my love of carnivorous plants. However, other previous documentary films had already covered the topic of carnivorous plants, often with impressive time-lapse and macro photography, which I had neither the equipment nor training to execute. I therefore decided that my different approach would be a human-interest film focusing on the effects of carnivorous plant cultivation on the life of the grower. Educational segments showcasing different carnivorous plant types would function as interludes within the film.

Pre-Production

For reasons of practicality, I needed to focus on subjects who were within a reasonable travel distance of me. I also wanted to invite subjects whose experiences with carnivorous plants would represent a unique aspect of the human condition. Eric Kunz is the owner of Seemore Carnivorous Gardens in St. James, New York, whose entire livelihood is dependent upon selling these unique plants. Matthew Kaelin is an author of the carnivorous plant art photography book, *The Sinister Beauty of Carnivorous Plants*, whose works I had seen at a gallery exhibition in Brooklyn several years earlier. Jonathan Mejia is the creator of The Sarracenia Forum, an online information source and discussion group for both novices and notable growers in the community. Iván Lacroix was, at the time, a teenager whose passion for carnivorous plants was inspiring, and whose knowledge base was very impressive for his age. My intent was for each of them to represent Livelihood, Art, Community, and Discovery, respectively. I was grateful when each of accepted my invitation to participate in what was, at that time, a for-profit project.

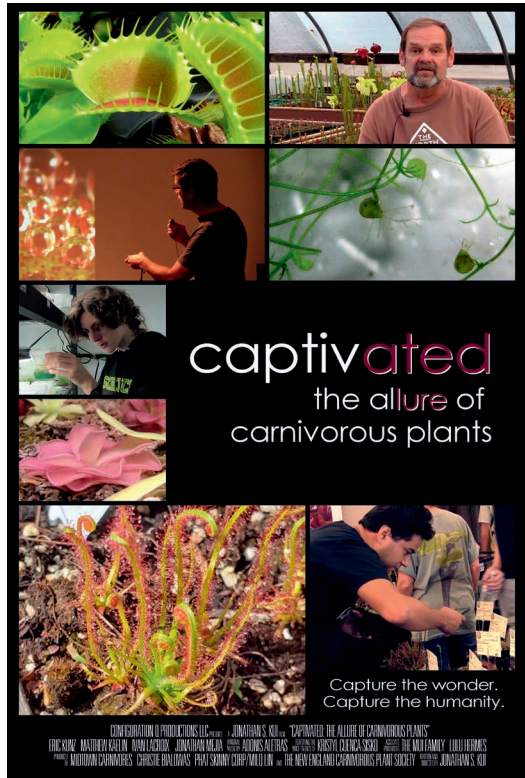


Figure 1: Poster used for film promotion.

To secure funding for the film project, I turned to Kickstarter, a popular online crowd-funding platform. I filmed a five-minute pitch reel to introduce the film's concept to prospective backers, primarily using footage and photos that I had shot, as well as a few photos submitted by each of the four subjects to introduce themselves. I projected costs for camera, sound and lighting equipment, gear, and travel, and used that figure as the funding target for the campaign.



Figure 2: Matthew Kaelin photographing a field of *Drosera filiformis* in their native habitat on Long Island.

The campaign launched on 30 October 2015, and concluded on 29 November, meeting its funding goal with the assistance of 26 backers.

Production

Principal photography began on 7 February 2016, using a Canon Vixia HF G20. Footage was captured in 1080p, at 24 fps saved in a 29.97 fps container (“Canon Cinema 24fps”). I followed each of the subjects intermittently throughout 2016, attempting to divide the film into Winter, Spring, Summer, and Autumn periods, with one interview day and one “event” day, per person, per season. Eric’s coverage was primarily at his place of business in St. James, with location shoots at educational events in Suffolk County, New York and a street fair in Nyack, New York. As an expert in the native carnivorous plants of Long Island, Matthew brought us to habitats in Manorville, New York and the Hamptons, where we were able to film several species of *Drosera*, *Utricularia*, and *Sarracenia* in the wild. Jonathan’s coverage was in Manhattan and at Brooklyn Botanic Garden. Iván’s coverage brought us to Governor’s Island, New York and Ithaca, New York, where we were graciously treated to a tour of Ryan Georgia’s nursery. Thanks to the New England Carnivorous Plant Society, we were graciously given permission to film Jonathan and Iván on a trip to the 2016 New England Carnivorous Plant Show, where they met Matthew for the first time, after his presentation on his art photography book.

In addition to the documentary subjects, I was also grateful to the New York Hall of Science, Brooklyn Botanic Garden, Queens Botanical Garden, and the Brooklyn Public Library for allowing me to in-



Figure 3: Ryan Georgia, of Native Exotics nursery, gives a greenhouse tour to Iván Lacroix.

interview staff members, with several of whom I had previously worked in my capacity as a carnivorous plant nursery owner. This interview footage was used to assemble a coda segment that briefly explored the role that carnivorous plants can play in society.

Principal photography concluded on 14 December 2016, with nearly 1600 different shots captured. Additional pickup shots, primarily of plants, continued to be filmed intermittently through 2020 as editing needs arose, using a Canon PowerShot SX520 HS.

Post-Production

This was both my first unscripted film and my first feature-length film. Compared to the short films on which I had previously worked, I was unprepared for how long the post-production process would take on a film of this nature. Assembly of the rough cut began in January 2017, in Adobe Premiere Pro CS6. Transcription of all 10 hours of interview footage was completed near the end of that year. A 2½-minute trailer was assembled and released on YouTube on 30 December 2017, while editing the documentary continued.

In May 2018, I received a message from a third party that expressed concerns about an image submitted by one of the subjects, which had been used in the Kickstarter pitch video. The third party was concerned about the use of the image (which featured their property) as no permission had been obtained for its use. This was, of course, a misunderstanding on my part, as I was not aware of their involvement in the submitted image until they contacted me, and it was resolved very amicably through discussion and subsequent attribution in the final film credits. However, with uncertainty as to whether there could exist other potential unknowns that could expose me to personal liability, I took a six-month hiatus from post-production to decide whether or not this project should continue. In the end, my passion to tell this story led me to the decision to continue, announcing on 26 March 2019 that the project was shifting from a for-profit project to a freely-distributed non-profit film, to manage risk.

The rough edit was completed on 24 March 2020. A film score was composed remotely in April 2020 by a previous collaborator of mine, Greek Cypriot composer Adonis Aletras. Full voiceover narration was provided by Kristyl Cuenca-Sisko in January 2021. Final post-production fixes (focus, color correction, sound levels, etc.) were completed on 11 May 2021, with the final film having a running time of 79 minutes.

Release

The film was uploaded to FilmFreeway for submission to film festivals in May 2021. By March 2022, the film had screened at five festivals and the 2021 New England Carnivorous Plant Society Show. It won three awards

- Best Documentary Feature at Festopedia Cinemas and Scripts, Mohali, India
- Best Documentary Film at Mabig Film Festival, Augsburg, Germany
- Best Science Film at GeekFest, Toronto, Canada

and is listed on IMDB (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt14636936/reference>). On 1 March 2022, the film was released for free public screening on YouTube and FilmFreeway, and is now available for wide public viewing.

To view the film, and for more information including direct viewing links, please visit <http://www.captivatedthefilm.com>.