A short visit to find carnivorous plants in Northern Taiwan

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Abstract: Roads in the slightly mountainous areas of Northern Taiwan provide access to observe multiple carnivorous plant species. Amongst them are *Utricularia* species, presumably introduced by hobbyists many years ago. I present here my findings from a series of visits, documenting the species observed, their habitats, and their interactions within this unique environment.

With its giant sprawling streets and concrete jungles, Taipei seems like the last place to find carnivorous plants out in the wild. Yet in the northern area of the city, by the foothills of Yangmingshan, there are areas where one can find some bladderworts and sundews. Well known to local hobbyists, this site offers a number of invasive bladderworts that can be easily found along the road. I had visited this site twice, once in February and another time in June to see if I could photograph more bladderworts in bloom.

These carnivorous plants mostly grew by the road, in roadside ditches, or on exposed rock faces dripping with water, so I started my trips at the top of the hill and walked along the road downhill. After 5 minutes of walking, I came to a small, exposed area next to a drainage ditch where I found a couple of bladderworts and sundews.

The first site had some *Drosera spatulata* growing alongside some *Utricularia smithiana* and various *Eriocaulon* species (Fig. 1). *Drosera spatulata* that were growing in more exposed spots were

Figure 1: *Drosera spatulata* growing with *Utricularia smithiana* and a pipewort in the genus *Eriocaulon*. These pipeworts can be found commonly growing alongside carnivorous plants, sharing similar ecological niches as *Drosera.* The *U. smithiana* growing in this location were more greenish in color.

typically smaller in size but had a stronger reddish coloration. Other plants that were blooming at that time had pinkish blooms. I continued on and passed a cement wall with water dripping down the edges—an almost perfect terrestrial *Utricularia* habitat. On that cement wall (Fig. 2), large patches of *U. smithiana* (Figs. 3 and 4) and *U. livida* (Fig. 5A) were thriving. Although I did not see any *U. smithiana* flowers, there were plenty of *U. livida* flowers in bloom. Interestingly, some *U. smithiana* that were growing in more exposed areas had developed a reddish-purple coloration on their leaves. Plants that grew in more shaded areas had larger and darker green leaves.

Out of the three plants I found in the area, only one, *D. spatulata*, is native to Taiwan. The other two bladderworts are naturalized species, introduced more than a decade ago, presumably by local collectors. Since then, these bladderworts have been slowly spreading along the road. These naturalized bladderworts seem to compete with local terrestrial bladderworts such as *U. bifida*, which I had not seen in the first location (I heard later that someone had spotted *U. bifida* further down the road).

Leaving the cement wall behind, I made my way to the next location, where *U. graminifolia* (Fig. 5B) started to appear in roadside drainage ditches. These plants were growing on nothing but leaves and debris. Some plants had started blooming with light blue flowers.

As I continued down the hill, I noticed an elderly couple on a motorcycle periodically stopping along the road with tweezers and a plastic bag to pluck *D. spatulata* from the ground. Curious about

Figure 2: The cement wall on which the *Utricularia livida* and *U. smithiana* were growing. Water is dripping down the wall, which probably would have allowed the *Utricularia* to grow. Part of the exposed wall is visible in the top right corner of the image.

Figure 3: *Utricularia smithiana* growing in a more exposed area. The leaves showed a deeper purple coloration compared to plants growing in shadier areas.

Figure 4: A lush lawn of *Utricularia smithiana* growing in a slightly shaded area, showing a greener coloration than those in more exposed areas.

Figure 5: (A) *Utricularia livida* flower. (B) Blooming *Utricularia graminifolia* in a roadside ditch with nothing but fallen debris.

their activities, I approached them and learned that they were harvesting the sundews to dry and make tea, a traditional remedy for coughs and colds. They showed me their plastic bag filled with carefully collected sundews and explained that they selectively plucked larger plants, leaving the smaller ones to grow.

I kept walking down the hill after they left to try and find any *U. bifida*, *U. tricolor*, or flowering *U. smithiana* but I found none. Hopefully, next time.