The Saga of the Hurricane Creek White
Sarracenia leucophylla

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A Memorial

Once upon a time, there was, off the Alabama Interstate highway in Baldwin County, south of the Perdido-Atmore interchange of I-65, one of the most striking regions for *Sarracenia* habitation. Roughly 60-80 km (40-50 miles) northeast of Mobile Alabama, and about 110 km (70 miles) north of the Gulf Coast, this area was unique for having a confluence of ranges for uncommon wetland species both carnivorous and non-carnivorous. For years, if not decades, it had been a mecca for biologists, naturalists, as well as carnivorous plant enthusiasts. Four species of pitcher plants grew here: *Sarracenia leucophylla*, *S. purpurea* subsp. *venosa* var. *burkii*, *S. rubra* subsp. *wherryi*, and *S. psittacina*. It was a menagerie of species that you would not have been likely to encounter anywhere else.

It is important to note that, although some of the habitat is privately owned by individuals or families, the majority of the vast amount of real estate that encompasses the region is owned mainly by the International Paper Company.

State Route 61 runs north-south and bisects I-65 right through this savannah habitat. Just off to the north extending 400 meters (1/4 mile) was a hydrologic system consisting of many rivulets and seepage zones, which together was called Hurricane Creek. It meandered out of a bluff as a subterranean watercourse, emerging from the ground about 4 km (2.5 miles) north of I-65. At the creek source, there was a bog system with many specimens of large red *Sarracenia leucophylla* and *S. purpurea* and several species of *Drosera*. It then flowed south towards the interstate. Along the way, there were alternating areas of bog and woodland habitats. About 800 meters (0.5 miles) north of the interstate it opened into a large, rolling savannah. Like the agricultural wheat fields of the midwestern plains, the brushlike inflorescent stalks of hundreds of *Ctenium aromaticum* (a longleaf pine savannah grass of the southeastern coastal plain) swayed to and fro high above the vast numbers of *S. leucophylla*, *S. rubra* subsp. *wherryi*, *S. purpurea*, and *S. psittacina*, as well as natural hybrids. It was in this area that I first observed pure white *Sarracenia leucophylla* (i.e. leaves with the upper one third of the pitcher snow white with no visible red venation). But these plants were not the anthocyanin-free forms—in fact, the crowns were very red and it was only by close examination that I could differentiate these forms from the true anthocyanin-free form which could also be found in this region. Most interestingly, they produced the typical red flower. Even so, these anthocyanin-containing, snow white *Sarracenia leucophylla* along Hurricane Creek were the showiest white forms of the species I had ever encountered during my many years of field work. Plants of this form could also be found in some areas along both sides of the interstate highway system, but the most striking plants I had found grew about 800 meters (0.5 miles) north just off SR 61. (Most of the *Sarracenia leucophylla* at Hurricane Creek were typical plants, only a relatively small fraction were the particularly beautiful ones I am discussing here.) A jeep trail running off SR 61 took you right into a super, huge savannah of *Sarracenia* and other bog flora that carried on for quite some distance. It was an impressive sight!

Unfortunately, in 1996 hundreds of acres of this habitat was not only clearcut for a pine plantings, but the area was also "moonscaped" (i.e. the growing surface was completely

removed, leaving the bare soil exposed), obliterating almost all of the herbaceous plant life! As a lover of the natural environment, it was the worst assault of a pitcher plant savannah I had ever witnessed. We are talking about tens of thousands of unique and uncommon plants in what was probably the prime ecosystem in the region going under.

Luckily, I was able to obtain a few specimens of this unique white form *Sarracenia leucophylla* before the disaster struck, and I selected a few particularly vigorous and attractive clones to carry the name *Sarracenia leucophylla* 'Hurricane Creek White' as a memorial to this destroyed site (see article on page 19).

Thoughts on Anthocyanin-Free Plants

I have come to accept that the white plants from Hurricane Creek (and especially including the cultivar *Sarracenia leucophylla* 'Hurricane Creek White') are far superior to the anthocyanin-free form of *Sarracenia leucophylla*. I have both forms and there is no comparison regarding plant vigor and size. In addition, a large percentage of the anthocyanin-free forms (hybrids excluded) exhibit some physiological anomalies that keep them from ever becoming show pieces. These anomalies include poor growth performance, a higher susceptibility to fungus and infection, and low fertility. The only anthocyanin-free *Sarracenia* I have grown that counter these claims are the *S. psittacina* 'Green Rosette' from Gulf County, Florida (Hummer, 2001), and the *Sarracenia rubra* subsp. *gulfensis* found by Jim Bockowski in the late 1980s. I believe that Sheridan and Scholl have a form of anthocyanin-free *Sarracenia leucophylla* that is fairly vigorous as these forms go, however I have not raised this clone so I cannot make accurate judgements about it.

If my analysis of the anthocyanin-free forms of *Sarracenia* was incorrect, then one would expect to find many more anthocyanin-free forms in the wild, especially in small colonies, which is very uncommon. *S. psittacina* 'Green Rosette' illustrates this point clearly. Where I originally found this clone growing, there were at least half a dozen other specimens in the same general area, and more have been recently reported (P. Sheridan, personal communication, 2001). It is unusually vigorous, and selfs well producing a sizeable crop of seed. Few anthocyanin-free *Sarracenia* do this, with the exception of the northern *Sarracenia purpurea* f. *heterophylla*. This is not a personal attack on anthocyanin-free forms—I have had many anthocyanin-free forms and have made many crosses with them. I have enjoyed raising them very much. These conclusions are based on my many years of field observations and personal growing experiences with many forms and variants of both anthocyanin-free and typical pigmented forms of plants. The anthocyanin-free variants are certainly interesting for what they are, but they are very restricted to being what they are—one can never expect to obtain the breeding dynamics with them that you can with the *Sarracenia* that incorporate the carotenoids and flavanoid compounds that give plants the spectacular colors we are all so awed with when we observe them!

Hummer, J. 2001, New Cultivars: *Sarracenia psittacina* 'Green Rosette', Carniv. Pl. Newslett. 30, p115-116.

Looking Back: CPN 25 years ago

Tom Story noted a problem still mentioned on modern internet discussions: "In closing I would like to warn all CP growers who have cats of an experience that happened to me lately. As my cats regularly use a catbox of kitty litter, they apparently recognized my terrarium (which I had inadvertently left uncovered) as a catbox and used it as such, with the disastrous result of destroying many of the plants with either urine or burial."

Also, twenty five years ago, Carnivorous Plant Newsletter graduated from being a black and white photocopied set of typed sheets to a printed, color journal very similar to its current format. The Newsletter had "arrived!"