The Northern Rainbow Plant — Byblis liniflora

by Dr. P. S. Lavarack
Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service
Pallarenda 4810
AUSTRALIA

The genus *Byblis* consists of two species—*B. gigantea*, a species restricted in range to southwest Western Australia, and *B. liniflora*, which occurs across the northern part of the Australian continent and also Papua New Guinea. These two species are the only members of the family Byblidaceae. Although superficially resembling *Drosera* to a marked degree, *Byblis* is now almost always placed in a separate family which is not usually seen as being closely related to *Drosera* by most modern taxonomists. In northern Australia, where *B. liniflora* occurs, it is frequently mistaken for *Drosera indica,* one example of this being in a recently published book ("A Wilderness in Bloom," by Bill and Betty Hinton).

B. liniflora is a plant of sandy situations, usually in areas which are moist for at least part of the year. The climate over northern Australia is monsoonal with a wet season in the hot part of the year from about December to April. The remainder of the year ranges from dry to very dry and remains warm to hot even in winter. *B. liniflora* is abundant around soaks or seasonal water holes, usually in areas at least partly shaded by herbs or larger plants. In permanently moist situations this species may be a perennial, but in areas subject to drying out it is more commonly an



Typical habitat of *Byblis liniflora.* This was photographed at the end of the wet season. A few months late this area would be dry and no plants of *Byblis* would be visible.



Byblis liniflora

annual.

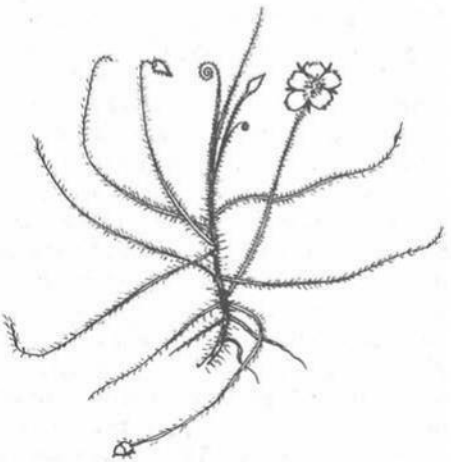
It is an abundant species in coastal Queensland north from Rockhampton, in Cape York Peninsula, the northern part of the northern Territory, and in the Kimberley area of Western Australia, but is often overlooked as it is hidden by the prolific growth of the ground layer in the wet season. It also occurs in the Western Province of Papua, New Guinea and presumably in West New Guinea (Irian Jaya) as well. In New Guinea it grows in low altitude monsoonal savanna woodlands similar to those in northern Australia.

Each flower is borne on a long slender peduncle. They are bluish-pink or occasionally white, and are about one cm in diameter, with five broad petals. The leaves are thread-like, up to several cm long, and are relatively sparsely covered with glandular hairs. The whole plant is commonly about six to ten cm tall but may be as large as 30 cm. The plants tend to have a weak root system and larger plants often lie along the surface of the soil with the apex bent upwards. Flowering time is irregular but mainly in the wet season from December to April. Plants growing in permanently moist situations may flower at any time of the year.

As mentioned earlier it is easy to confuse this species with even more abundant *Drosera indica.* However, the many flowered inflorescence and the coarser leaves of the latter are useful field characteristics to separate these species. As well as *Drosera indica, B. liniflora* often grows in association with other carnivorous plants such as *D. petiolaris, D. spathulata, D. burmanni, Utricularia chrysantha* and in northern parts of the Peninsula, *Nepenthes mirabilis.*

Cultivation. Plants collected in the wild rarely seem to survive and they certainly do not travel well. Propagation is best achieved from seed which germinates readily on a damp sand and peat mix. The plants grow well and will last for several years if not kept overly wet and if given half shade and humid, warm conditions. As an insurance it is a good idea to harvest seed each year and treat as an annual. Some more information on cultivation is available in a useful article in an earlier CPN. (J. Mazrimas: The Byblis Family. CPN IV (2): 30, 31, 1975).

Conservation. This is one carnivorous plant species which is not subject to threats of extinction. In some areas of Cape York Peninsula with which I am familiar this plant is abundant and, even in the dry season, plants may be found. It occurs in most, if not all of the large Cape York National Parks and would certainly be in several Parks and Reserves in the northern Territory and Western Australia.



Byblis liniflora
Drawing by Ron Fleming