

# A Second Record of Rats as Prey in *Nepenthes rajah*

A. Phillipps, P.O. Box 10960  
88810 Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia

Many publications on pitcher-plants have repeated reports of frogs, birds and even mammals trapped by the plants for food, in addition to their normal insectivorous diet. However, few of these reports have been, or can be verified, and there are few published records. Until now the only authentic report of trapped mammals appeared to be that of Spenser St. John, in 1862 in his "Life in the Forests of the Far East." Here he reports on a visit to Kinabalu, saying "Mr. Low, while wondering in search of flowers, came upon.... (a pitcher of *Nepenthes rajah*) in which was a drowned rat."

For a long time, in the absence of other records, it seemed possible that this report might have been the result of a joke being played on Low and St. John by their Dusun guides, but a visit to a *Nepenthes rajah* area in the Kinabalu Park in April 1987 proved me wrong.

Betsy Andrews and I visited the site in April to collect the larvae of insects breeding in the water-filled pitchers for a Sabah Parks research project. To our surprise, we found not just one, but two drowned rats in two separate pitchers of *Nepenthes rajah*! The corpses, floating on top of the liquid in the pitchers were quite fresh and are now stored as specimens at the Kinabalu Park Headquarters.

Unfortunately, both the rats proved to be juveniles, and it was not possible to identify them below the genus *Rattus*.

How would the rats have got trapped in the first place? We visited the area at the end of a drought period of several months, and the site was very dried up. Though a small stream flowed down the valley below the site, there was no other source of liquid at the site itself. The rats therefore, were probably in search of water, and made the fatal mistake of climbing into the *N. rajah* pitchers to obtain it. Possibly, they were also sick and weakened, thus being easily prevented from climbing out again by the very slippery rim of the pitchers and strong, sharply pointed peristome.

## Acknowledgements

I should like to thank R. Steubing for trying to identify the rats; and the Sabah Parks for having given me the opportunity to visit the *Nepenthes rajah* area.

## References

St. John, Spenser. 1862. Life in the Forests of the Far East. Oxford University Press reprint 1974.



*Nepenthes* drawing by Ron Fleming