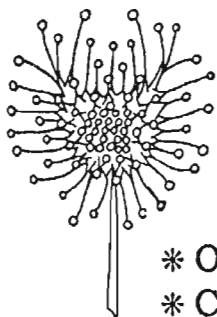


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## *Nepenthes pervillei*

**Travel report to accompany the new CP-video**

by

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Tropical surroundings without anti-malaria drugs, with carnivorous plants for our new video, and possibilities for snorkeling - These were what we asked of our holiday for 1992. The photo of *Nepenthes pervillei* in the brochure of 'Feria', tour operators persuaded us to make our main booking for the island of Silhouette, one of the Seychelles islands which lie between Africa and India. The accompanying brochure text promised primeval rain-forest with richly varied flora, including many of the pitcher plants of the illustration, these being accessible by a footpath.

On 31.8.1992 we flew from Frankfurt to the main island of Mahe, and the day thereafter we transferred to our goal: Silhouette, 17 km away (about 10 miles), in a relatively small motor-boat with quite a sea running. To some of the passengers this meant a 'sacrifice on Neptune's altar'. I would have liked to film the island as we approached it, with it's dense vegetation of coconut palms and takamaka trees along the dazzling white beach, ascending steeply up to the cloud covered summit at 650 metres plus (about 2000 feet). Instead, sitting on the planking of the deck, I had to cling onto my photographic equipment, holding myself firmly to the steersman's seat as this was firmly screwed down. Irmgard and I thus had a degree of protection from the spray but after two hours of this roller-coaster progress we were more or less wet through.

But with solid ground under our feet again, that long awaited holiday feeling took over. Our bungalow, simple but adequately equipped, lay a mere 5 meters (ca 50 feet) from the shore, it's whiteness broken every hundred meters or so by black granite rocks. Beyond that lay the Indian Ocean, at a temperature of 26°C (nearly 80°F). At low tide it was peaceful and showed all varieties of blue and turquoise; but at high water it made a vigorous onslaught, noisily seeking to undermine the roots of the takamaka trees in front of our temporary home. Such aggressiveness was otherwise only shared by the mosquitoes. Our attempts with insect-repellant achieved little more than that some of the pests died laughing! We soon learnt to keep away after dusk from the magnificent jungle starting a mere 300 meters (about 1000 feet) behind the hotel grounds, after Irmgard had suffered 25 stings in a mere 10 minutes. Yet during the daytime we remained in the rain-forest virtually trouble-free. On the Seychelles there are neither dangerous predators nor poisonous snakes;

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nevertheless one must still be constantly wary as we found on our first attempt to reach *Nepenthes*.

At the reception desk in the 'Silhouette Island Lodge', the only hotel on the island. we were given in apparent innocence information that the pitcher plants grow on the peak and the path to them branches off at the church. So on the second day after our arrival, we set off, armed with video equipment, tripod, monopod and a plentiful supply of mineral water. The path began to climb steeply immediately behind the little village. After a few hundred meters the roar of the surf was superseded by the rustling and cracking of the trees in the warm wind at a temperature of 27°C (80°F), interrupted only by the piping and clicking of sundry birds which looked curiously down on the puffing and sweating intruders. Along the edge of the path numbers of brown lizards rooted and rustled in the superficially dry leaf-litter which was broken ever and again by the typical black granite rocks. With increasing altitude and atmospheric humidity these outcrops were covered with algae, mosses and lichens. These growths were being grazed by brown slugs some 20 cm (8 inches) long, precisely at those spots where we wanted to support ourselves and hold on. Another magnificent sight was the giant millipedes, over 30 cm (12 inches) long, which also inhabited these rock formations that sometimes reminded one of prehistoric monsters. More and more this mountain appeared to consist of willfully scattered, rounded, granite blocks, in all sizes. Between these were gulleys and clefts filled with luxurious plantlife. It smelt of moss and damp leaves and numberless exotic fruits, all pleasantly aromatic to our senses.

When we had been under way for some two hours we had the impression that we must have missed the peak we were seeking. Two small paths had indeed already branched off, but since they were blocked by fallen trees we ignored them. No mention had been made of them when the route was described to us. And then, as I walked into the web of a gigantic spider which I had failed to push aside as previously with monopod, and suddenly found myself staring at close quarters into all the eyes of the proprietor, we turned back. After all, we still had 9 days, time enough to search for carnivorous plants. The return trip had the advantage that there was no need this time to push aside the meter (yard) wide webs of these spiders which in themselves were about 20 cm (8 inches) long! Their bite is certainly painful but is not considered dangerous. Luckily too the creatures are not aggressive and prefer to avoid contact.

Before our next attempt we again asked at the hotel as to the proper route. This time the information was much more detailed and there was even a map of the island. We learnt too that the path to the summit - a mere tourist footpath according to the 'Feria' brochure - was barricaded by a fallen tree (in fact there were several trees) because it was quite dangerous and for several days after rain it became impassable. As proof that he had himself once visited these pitcher plants the hotel employee showed us several photos. These quite astonished me because they showed two forms of pitcher, differing in both shape and colour. On the one hand there was the typical green amphora-like *Nepenthes pervillei*, while in the other pictures I would rather have assumed *N. alata*, with the pitchers considerably more slender in the upper part. But known up to now in the Seychelles there was only the endemic *N. pervillei*. Was this latter just considerably more variable than hitherto assumed? Or is there indeed a second species on Silhouette? I dismissed any idea that the hotel employee was attempting to sensationalize the matter since his knowledge of CP was limited to the concept of pitcher plants and the popular French name - Liane pot a eau - about

which he was always being questioned by tourists. Unlike on the main island of Mahe, where the primeval rain-forest has long been chopped down, to be replaced with crops of various kinds, these forests on Silhouette are still virtually untouched. So why not two species ?

Two days later we set off again immediately after breakfast, scrambling over several tree-trunks placed across the way, this time following the correct path which, however, proved even trickier than the one we had taken before. Over 400 meters (ca 1250 feet) the granite rocks, the main feature of the path thereabouts - became increasingly slippery while the previously mentioned creepycrawlies appeared in even greater numbers. Apart from ourselves there was far and wide not another human being, but we often saw flying foxes with a wingspan of over a meter (yard), groups of which resembled Dracula's hordes! In fact they are harmless and quite droll creatures which only eat fruit and which are rated a delicacy by the natives. Here there was a wide assortment of palms, with and without thorns, trees with buttress roots, wild pineapple, orchids, ferns, even a few coco-de-mer palms which officially do not exist on Silhouette and which have nuts weighing over 20 kg (45 lbs), being thus the world's largest seeds. But nowhere did we find the least trace of pitcher plants. When we were still an estimated 40 meters (ca 150 feet) below the summit the so-called 'tourist path' degenerated into a natural run-off for rainwater, it's bed consisting of moss-covered rocks and boulders, all at a very steep gradient. Any slip here would have meant at very least the end of the video-gear. For over 5 hours we had been climbing rather than walking, and time was against us as it was absolutely vital we should be clear of the forest before dusk. The decision to turn back caused almost physical pain since I so much wanted material for our new video, and it had cost Irmgard enormous effort to scramble thus far, with the slipperiness of the track and the dozens of enormous spider-webs. So I spoke a furious commentary into the camera (part of which I cut when editing, so that the film should still be fit to show to children!); then I regained my composure because this truly untamed jungle still made the expedition worth while.

Any further attempt to reach the summit came to naught: In the first place the boy who had promised to be our guide cried off at 10 o'clock on the previous evening since he could not leave the hotel; and in the second place the rain started to fall.

So I have to leave to some more fortunate successor the riddle of a possible second *Nepenthes* species on Silhouette. We ourselves still had two aces up our sleeve, even if only on the main island of Mahe. For safety sake, on our arrival there I had arranged a day's tour through the local travel office where we would have the services of an accredited mountain guide, Basil Beaudouin. If even that failed, Allan Lowrie in Australia, when he heard of our plans, had kindly sent me a handdrawn map of nepenthes habitats on the main island.

This time, to avoid seasickness, we chartered a helicopter back to Mahe. This took a mere quarter-hour for the 17 km and gave us some interesting views for the video. Having arrived at the hotel we immediately telephoned Basil Beaudouin who came round that same day to discuss plans. He was a tall, friendly, black Seychelles, some 30 years old, with outstanding knowledge of the island. He had even chosen the pitcher plant as his guide's logo; he had been interested in his island's flora since childhood and knew almost every plant personally. He promised to lead us to THE finest place.

We drove by car to about 400 meters altitude (1250 feet) and then proceeded on foot over small paths, past a pine wood and various palms and cinnamon trees whose young shoots of brilliant red were very conspicuous. From about 600 meters (1850 feet) we had a magnificent view over Mahe with cloud-covered Silhouette on the horizon. The ground consisted of the now-familiar black rocks as well as a mix of laterite and coarse granite sand. Although even here we sometimes had to advance by climbing rather than walking, the ascent was appreciably simpler than during our efforts on the smaller island. And suddenly it was as if we had crossed an invisible line of demarcation.

'They' grew along the path, on bushes 1 - 2 meters high, they even used their tendrils to clamber up the few scattered trees in the vicinity. Green amphora-like pitchers, mostly arranged in rosettes, rearing without support into the air. These rosettes were then succeeded by meter-long stems, as in *N. ampullaria*. Although it had now started to rain heavily, Basil pointed upwards and, wreathed in smiles, assured us that further on it would be much better still. With a few additional meters of altitude the downpour became just a fine drizzle and our guide pointed to a bank, and we could see he had not exaggerated. *N. pervillei* was by far the dominant plant. The rocks were clothed in an enormous network of carnivorous plants which extended over bushes and trees. Amidst this nepenthes-carpet we sat down under three large palm-leaves brought to us by Basil, and in high good humour we ate our lunch-packets. Scarcely had we finished eating than the equatorial sun broke through, transforming the scene into a steaming vista with shafts of light between the nepenthes urns. I grabbed the camera and filmed everything I could in order to have some sequences in the can before the next downpour. In so doing I realized that all the pitchers looked so healthy. And then I noticed a peculiarity of these fascinating plants as soon as a pitcher, which is attached to the leaf by a short stalk and stands surprisingly upright (other species would surely tip over!), begins to shrivel it turns over so that its content fall to the ground to the benefit of all other plants. Once leaf and pitcher have dried up and taken on a dark brown to almost black colour, the whole section lays itself against the stem, after the manner of palm-trees. In this way it is always the young fresh pitchers and inflorescences of nepenthes that project into the air, and this conspicuously adds to the attraction. We found astonishingly few plants in bloom. Mature seed-heads were a genuine rarity when compared with the multitude of bushes with urns. However, we did manage to find a few of the dark brown ripe capsules, these being open above, giving them almost the appearance of small jugs. The seeds themselves are jet-black, some 2 mm (one-twelfth of an inch) long, with a thin projection at one end; this, all in all, is very unusual in nepenthes.

Moreover the pitcher colour reverses the usual trend. Upper specimens in full sun are light to yellowish green; but on the ground among the shrubs and in part leafcovered, they are intensely dark to brownish red, so that with their swollen shape and large lid, they almost have the appearance of small *Nepenthes rajah*. Interestingly enough, the insides of the lids of pitchers on the rocks were deep red, yet hanging in the air and with a light background they were light to yellowish green, like the rest of the urns, some of which also had red flecking.

Suddenly it darkened again, presaging the next shower. At the last moment I managed to stow the camera away, but I was not quick enough in getting under my sheltering palm-leave with the result that, in mere seconds, my nearly-dry clothing was again dripping wet. *N. pervillei*, with its large and almost circular lid, is peculiarly well adapted to these cloudbursts since very little rain gets into the pitcher

to wash out the nutrients or even cause it to tip over. Only rarely were the pitchers filled to more than a third of the lower swollen portion.

After 4-5 hours, with rain and sun alternating at 20-minute intervals, we commenced the descent, still keeping a look-out for alata-shaped urns. Then at last, when we had almost reached the lower limit of the nepenthes, Irmgard slipped at just the right place, inflicting some scratches on her leg, but bringing in front of my camera-lens an unfamiliar shape. The brown colour was in itself unusual, the lower swollen section was neither spherical nor barrel-shaped, and it was succeeded by a narrow 'neck', from which an oval peristome led obliquely up to the lid. The nearly circular widening of this horny margin of the trap, which gives *N. pervillei* its typical amphora-like appearance, was completely lacking; thus giving a resemblance to the alata-type. However the round lid showed that at most this was a hybrid with some earlier species formerly living in the now-demolished primeval forest lower down the slope and *N. pervillei* growing on the summit. In addition to the shape and colour, the tendril between leaf and trap was appreciably longer than in the other carnivorous plants alongside. It remains an interesting question for some nepenthes specialists to investigate as to whether some second species did in fact exist there or perhaps even still persists on Silhouette (or if that all is only a variation of the well known *N. pervillei*). If anyone wishes to investigate the matter, we strongly recommend he gets in touch with:

### **Basil Beaudouin - Macabee - Mahe - Seychelles.**

He is always delighted to make contact with carnivorous-plant enthusiasts, and his charges are both reasonable and affordable. It remains true that the Seychelles represent an expensive long-haul, but if anyone is after all able to fly there and to find out anything new about the pitcher plants (or 'Liane pot a eau') there, I would greatly appreciate hearing about it. Irmgard and I have the warmest recollections of Basil and his dream-islands with their nepenthes-peaks.

A summary of our CP-searches, with pictures of the debatable second species, can be seen on our new video (approx. 1 hour) entitled 'Insectivorous Plants Video 1993' (German language), which will be available at the end of February 1993. Further, there will be a treatment of Australian tuberous *Drosera* (In German = Onion-Drosera) which do not have onions. *Roridula* bugs are examined also in close-up and there is some account of the CP-year 1992 (AGM, Swiss meeting at Aarburg etc.) and a CP-quiz with real prizes. For the time being I hope I have succeeded in conveying to those unable to fly to the Seychelles some impression of the fascination of this tropical paradise.

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## **Notes on Some *Darlingtonia californica* Torr. Bogs**

by  
Phil Sheridan and Bill Scholl  
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### Introduction

In 1988 we made a trip to northern California and Oregon to observe *Darlingtonia*