

NEPENTHES ATTENBOROUGHII:

A NEW SPECIES OF GIANT PITCHER PLANT FROM THE PHILIPPINES

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In June 2007, I was fortunate to visit the island of Palawan in the south of the Philippine archipelago with two friends and *Nepenthes* experts, Alastair Robinson and Volker Heinrich. We had previously received a report of populations of unknown highland *Nepenthes* from the summit of a little explored peak called Mount Victoria, and after receiving permission from the provincial mayor, we found local hunters who would guide us up the remote mountain to at least as far as they could take us.

On June 21st, after driving as far inland as possible, we began our trek, passing through dense, pristine, lowland rainforest and crossing many rivers into uninhabited and unknown territory. After two days of intense climbing, we reached the upper slopes of the mountain, and as the vegetation became increasingly short, at around 1600 meters (5249 ft) we suddenly saw one great pitcher plant, then a second, then many more. The *Nepenthes* bore spectacular wholly bell-shaped or infundibular lower pitchers (see Figure 1), up to 30 cm (11.8 in) tall and 16 cm (6.3 in) wide, with a volume up to 1.5 liters (1.58 qt). Each lower trap sported yellowish green colouration, generally mottled with dark red or purple colouration on the interior, the lower surface of the lid and on the peristome (see Back Cover). However, most young and newly opened pitchers were pure yellowish green. Our exploration of the summit of the mountain revealed that all populations of the *Nepenthes* occurred in direct sunlight amongst windswept, stunted, upper montane shrubs and scrub 1 metre (3.28 ft) tall or less. Most of the aged, mature plants had formed a rigid, upright or scrambling stem up to 1.5 m (4.9 ft) long, reminiscent of *N. rajah*. We observed that the great pitcher plants continued to the summit of Mount Victoria, which stands at 1726 m (5662 ft), and so all populations naturally experience cool, humid, highland conditions year round.

Unfortunately, one of our guides suffered an injury, and we began our descent of the mountain the following day. But it was nevertheless clear that the *Nepenthes* we had observed represented a new species and was one of the largest pitcher plants known. We had received permission to collect herbarium specimens, and so collected and pressed one of the great pitcher plants. As we descended Mount Victoria over the following two days, the three of us agreed that we would name the new plant in honor of Sir David Attenborough, whose inspirational life works have inspired generations toward a better understanding of the beauty and diversity of the natural world. And so, *Nepenthes attenboroughii* was described in the February 2009 edition of the Botanical Journal of the Linnean Society. The herbarium specimens were deposited at the herbarium of Palawan State University, known by the acronym PPC in Index Herbariorum.

An extensive account of the discovery and morphology of *Nepenthes attenboroughii* is presented in my new, two volume, 1399-page work *Pitcher Plants of the Old World*, which examines all species of *Nepenthes* known worldwide (see www.redfermnaturalhistory.com for more information).



Figure 1: A newly opened upper pitcher of *Nepenthes attenboroughii*. Note the temporary pure yellowish green colouration. The pitcher is likely to develop purple colouration as it ages. Photo by Stewart McPherson



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Front Cover: The spectacular pitchers of *Nepenthes alba* growing on the upper slopes of Mount Tahan. Photo by Stewart McPherson. Article on page 102.

Back Cover: The opening of a lower/intermediate pitcher of *Nepenthes attenboroughii* growing on the summit of Mount Victoria, Palawan. Photo by Stewart McPherson. Article on page 100.

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