

THE IUCN CARNIVOROUS PLANT SPECIALIST GROUP

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), is an international organization aimed at the protection of nature in a broad sense. It is made up by more than 1200 governments and nature organizations from all over the world and has a staff of about 1000 employees and over 11,000 volunteer scientists and specialists in more than 60 countries. The IUCN is best known for the Red List of threatened species that it maintains and that is used by many governments as a foundation of their conservation policy.



To achieve its goals, the IUCN is made up by several committees, one of them being the Species Survival Committee (SSC) that is aimed specifically at the IUCN work into threatened and endangered species. To help this committee several so called “Specialist groups” have been set up. These are groups of volunteer scientists and experts in a certain group of plants or animals that use this organizational construction to work together and provide the SSC with the necessary information on their chosen subject.

The Carnivorous Plant Specialist Group (CPSG) is one of those groups of volunteers. This group has a very special relation with the ICPS and not only by its chosen specialism. That is why I would like to take this time to tell you a little bit about the group and this relation.

In the past there had been a carnivorous plant group, but for several reasons that was disbanded long ago. However, at the 2010 ICPS Conference held in Leiden, a discussion was held as the closing session of the conference on what could be done to improve current policy and conservation activities at a larger scale. Individuals and even societies could not accomplish the changes that were deemed necessary by themselves. As a result, the idea was born to bring back a carnivorous plant group within the IUCN structure. Such things take time, but in 2012 the first directed efforts resulted in a rebirth on paper. After this, things went better at the 2014 ICPS Conference in Cairns and the CPSG was proudly introduced to the world.

The CPSG has started out very successfully. Chaired by Robert Cantley, it was decided that its first goal should be to make accurate assessments of the conservation status of all carnivorous plants. That this is a monumental task every one of us can imagine. With over 750 different species of carnivorous plants and new ones being found or split on what seems like a weekly basis, that task is huge. To make sure the assessments get properly done and submitted to the IUCN Red List unit, the group has a Red List focal point to manage this process. Dr. Charles Clarke was chosen for this challenging job.

This gave the CPSG two well-regarded specialists to form the core of the group, with the CPSG getting some impressive results. Its first major coup was to get a patron. Most specialist groups do not have a famous patron, which puts them at a disadvantage in an arena with a battlefield laid out by science, politics, and public opinion. Not so the CPSG. Not only did they manage to get a patron, they managed to get THE PATRON! No one less than Sir David Attenborough agreed to become patron to the CPSG.

As for his reasons, Sir David can very much better put that to words than I ever could, so I have attached the letter of introduction he wrote for the CPSG website.

In 2014, the CPSG made its first strong impression on the IUCN-SSC. No less than 60 species of *Nepenthes* were assessed and submitted. Also drafts of several species of *Drosera* were completed.

In 2015, the CPSG website got reinforced with two Facebook pages, one set up as an information page and one as a discussion group where people can interact with the CPSG Specialists and Members (Web addresses below this article).

These pages, run by Andrew Broome, Michael Schöner, and myself, managed to get a reasonable amount of attention and also scored the CPSG some points with the SSC. This, and the skill of its chair, resulted in two major successes in September 2015.

First of all, the genus *Utricularia* had always been the domain of the specialist group dealing with aquatic plants. In a SSC meeting last September, it was decided that *Utricularia* should go to their real home, the carnivorous family of the CPSG.

The value of the second success can't be overstated. It was decided to give the CPSG a huge boost to achieve its goals by giving it the support of the IUCN professionals for a fundraising campaign in November and December 2015. Basically, a 6-week professional fundraising campaign was set up with donation page, bulk e-mail to contacts, and interesting facts and blogs being sent into the world using the fast IUCN resources.

It was estimated that \$125,000 will be needed to assess all species of carnivorous plants: to collect information, to cover expenses of the unpaid volunteers making the assessments, and, if necessary, go into the field to get the information that is lacking.

The goal of the 6-week funding campaign was to raise \$25,000 of this amount to conduct a first 5-day-long workshop with a group of selected Specialists to assess as many species as possible. Hopefully, initial assessments of all species can be done, resulting in a clear list of so called "data deficient" species that will direct where to spend the remaining funds and concentrate the efforts to get more data.

This workshop brings me to another special relation of the CPSG with the ICPS. The workshop is to be held the week before the 2016 ICPS Conference in Kew, London, England. It is hoped that Conference attendees can be given an impression of the Red List process in action and that the preliminary results of the workshop can be presented at the ICPS Conference.

As I'm writing this, the fund raiser is still in full swing. I don't know if we are going to make the \$25,000 goal by December 31st, but that date is just the date when the IUCN professionals get reassigned to another job. We have more time to reach this goal so the donation option will remain open and of course there is that overall goal of \$125,000 to reach over a longer period of time.

The ICPS is of course in full support of this financial goal. Therefore, the ICPS Board decided to donate an initial \$5,000 to this effort. Other societies, companies, and private individuals are also donating and I would like to encourage everyone capable of making a donation to do so.

Assessing the conservation status of all carnivorous plant species is an important tool to decide how to focus conservation efforts and regulations.

It will provide a real-time reality check to politicians and collectors alike about the plants that are in their care and that we love so much.

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