

# ***Utricularia bisquamata* 'Betty's Bay'**

**An unusually large-flowered cultivar of *Utricularia bisquamata***

## **History**

I spent several of my teenage years in South Africa. This is where I was first introduced to carnivorous plants and was extremely lucky to experience some of the native South African species in the wild. In December 1984 I made a trip down to the Western Cape Province to stay with a friend who lived in a house in Betty's Bay, near Hermanus, to the east of False Bay. During a few very enjoyable weeks I did a bit of botanising in the area and found several species that I managed to identify, including *Droseras glabripes*, *capensis*, *trinervia* and *cuneifolia*. *Drosera trinervia* was the most common species, and seemed to grow everywhere, including stream sides, wet flushes and even beside roads and paths which were not obviously wet. The most interesting find however was actually growing in the back garden of my friend's house! The property enclosure included a small section of 'fynbos' vegetation which ran down to a stream, with the property itself being less than a kilometre from the sea and an estimated 5-10 metres above sea level. Near the stream, in amongst some rushy vegetation and *Zantedeschia aethiopica*, were some of the ubiquitous *Drosera trinervia*, and also some flowers and seed heads of what I guessed were *Utricularia* (I was very new to carnivorous plants at the time and had never seen a *Utricularia* in the flesh). I collected some seed of this plant, and subsequently managed to germinate this to produce a very fine-flowered *Utricularia* species, as then unidentified.

I returned to the UK in June 1985, and with me the unknown *Utricularia*. I showed the plant to Martin Cheek, now a taxonomic botanist at the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, but then a PhD student at Oxford with an interest in *Utricularia* taxonomy. He was very interested in the plant, but was not sure of the species, so took a sample to show Peter Taylor, renowned *Utricularia* taxonomist at Kew and author of 'The Genus *Utricularia*' taxonomic monograph. Peter subsequently identified the plant as a specimen of *Utricularia bisquamata*, an unusually large-flowered and colourful form but still within the range of flower sizes for the species which can be very variable.

Both Martin and I distributed the plant amongst various growers in the carnivorous plant community in the UK, and it has since become very widespread in collections throughout the UK and now other parts of the world.

## **Distinguishing features**

As far as I am aware, all the plants of this cultivar in cultivation originate from the one original introduction. The leaves are unremarkable and typical of the species, the specimen before me as I write this has leaves upto 4mm long above ground and just over 1mm wide at the widest point. It is, however, the flowers of this plant which are the most notable feature. I consider myself lucky not to grow the "normal" small-flowered form, as it has invasive

tendencies, and so I have never measured a flower. William Dawnstar grows 2 different smaller-flowered forms and tells me that size-wise the flowers are “about half the size of a match head, and the other about match head sized”. The flowers of ‘Betty’s Bay’ are huge in comparison, with the total height of the flower being upto 10mm long, and the lower lip of the flower measuring upto 11mm across at its widest point. The upper flower lip is pale yellow, with dark lilac longitudinal streaks, and is deeply notched at the apex giving the impression of 2 stubby “ears” at the top of the flower. The lower lip is predominantly lilac, but with an intense yellow patch at the base (top) of the lip; the lip is quite bulbous and ridged at this point, and there is area of darker lilac between this and the rest of the lip. The spur is slightly curved, and size-wise about half the total length of the flower long. When viewed from the front, the spur is not visible as it does not project below the lower lip. It is pale lilac in colour, fading towards the base (top). Each flower stalk can produce from 1 to several flowers in succession up the stalk; the specimen before me has 3 flowers/buds and measures 14cm high, but is not yet fully grown. Unlike the “normal” form in cultivation, which readily self-pollinates and seeds profusely all over adjacent pots, the ‘Betty’s Bay’ cultivar does not appear to set seed in cultivation unless hand pollinated.

See Figure 1, photograph of a flower of *Utricularia bisquamata* 'Betty's Bay'. Photo, Stephen Morley.



**Figure 1**

### **Cultivation**

The plant is vigorous and extremely easy to cultivate, thriving in a variety of common compost mixes, with a mixture of *Sphagnum* moss peat and sand or perlite being the most common medium, kept moist by standing in shallow water. It is an adaptable plant, and does equally well in shade or full sun, on a windowsill, in a greenhouse or terrarium, and copes well with temperature extremes from near freezing to in excess of 35 °C. Although a vigorous plant vegetatively, as it does not set seed easily is not invasive. The plant may be reproduced by seed, or more commonly by division. Flowers are produced in abundance almost non-stop from early summer through to the autumn.

### **Synonyms**

The plant has inadvertently been referred to by many different synonyms over the years including 'Bettys Bay', 'Betties Bay', and 'Giant Bay'. The correct spelling of the location is 'Betty's Bay', and so this name and spelling is proposed as the cultivar name, i.e. *Utricularia bisquamata* 'Betty's Bay'.

Stephen Morley  
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#### *Note:*

*This cultivar description was originally printed in The Carnivorous Plant Society Journal 2004, Vol 27. My surname was mis-spelt as Morely at the top of the article.*