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Carnivorous weeds on the loose

Have you seen these plants?

Carnivorous plants introduced from overseas have been found growing in the wild here, where they pose a threat to native plants. The Department of Conservation and the Auckland Regional Council are concerned that these plants may be spreading in parks around Auckland, especially at Whatipu within the Waitakere Ranges Regional Park. We are seeking the help of people who visit these places to locate populations of introduced carnivorous plants.

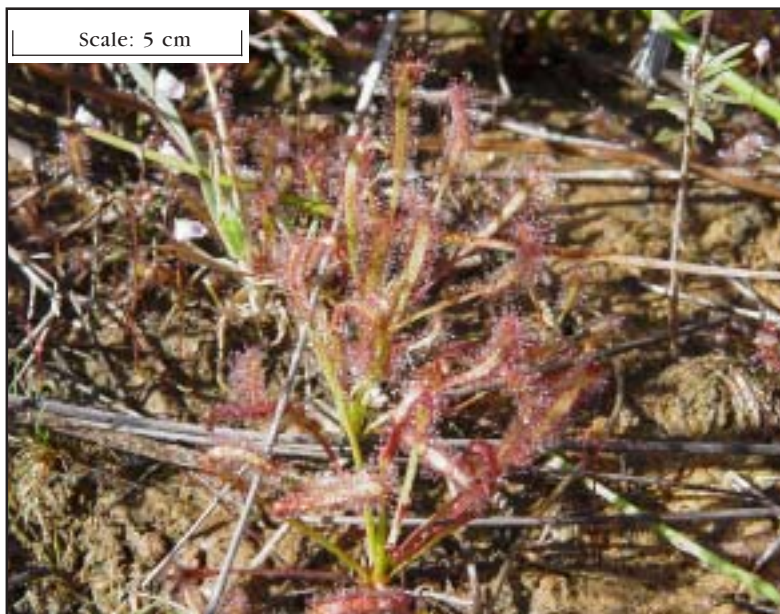
What are carnivorous plants?

Carnivorous plants catch and absorb live insects. Sundews trap insects on the sticky hairs on their leaves, while bladderworts snare tiny insects in sac-like traps under the soil or water. The insects provide a source of nutrients which allow carnivorous plants to survive in nutrient-poor soils. Introduced carnivorous plants can therefore colonise infertile habitats normally resistant to invasion by weeds. Already the introduced yellow flowering bladderwort (*Utricularia gibba*) has spread throughout the gum fields and dune lakes in the Waikato, Auckland and Northland.

DOC weed officers are working with the Auckland Regional Council to investigate the distribution of two invasive South African plants in the wild: Cape sundew (*Drosera capensis*) and a bladderwort (*Utricularia livida*).

The introduced Cape sundew with its distinctive sticky leaves threatens our native sundews

These two plants can be bought at plant retailers and are traded by carnivorous plant enthusiasts. They have also been planted in the wild or accidentally introduced through soil contaminated by seeds with plantings of pitcher plants and water lilies etc. They are now starting to spread of their own accord, possibly with help from water birds.



Cape sundew is a terrestrial, upright, tufted perennial plant. The numerous green leaves are up to 6.5 cm long and covered in sticky red hairs. It is easily distinguished from New Zealand species by its dark pink flowers on long stems that can reach 35 cm in height.

Utricularia livida is a creeping terrestrial bladderwort that favours damp organic soils and clay pans. At Whatipu, *U. livida* is growing covered by shallow water. In the Waikato, the related *Utricularia sandersonii* is colonising wetland areas. Both *Utricularia* species have broad spoon-shaped green leaves up to 2.5 cm long



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The alien *Utricularia livida* flowers in February. Scale: each flower is life size.

that lie flat on the ground. They are most noticeable over summer when they send up 10 cm tall stems with mauve or whitish flowers.

Several species of *Sarracenia* (pitcher plants) are also naturalising in sites of wet to damp clay throughout the country. Pitchers vary in height from 30 to 120 cm. They have been planted in the wild from Northland to Taranaki and have begun to spread from these plantings. Although these *Sarracenia* species are not likely to be very invasive, a major problem is that the seeds of other carnivorous plant species may be introduced with these plants through contaminated soil.

Our native carnivorous plants

New Zealand has its own native sundews and bladderworts. Those most likely to be found in association with the introduced plants noted here, are the bladderworts *Utricularia dichotoma* and *U. delicatula*, and the sundews *Drosera auriculata*, *D. peltata* and forked sundew (*D. binata*). Our bladderworts are much smaller than the introduced species and have narrow, strap shaped leaves, and solitary to twinned, purple, mauve or lilac flowers. Forked sundew can be distinguished from Cape sundew by its forked strap like leaves and white flowers, while *D. auriculata* and *D. peltata* have their sticky trap leaves in rosettes and also along the flowering stems.

How you can help

DOC weed staff in Auckland would like to hear from anyone who thinks they have seen these introduced carnivorous plants growing in the wild. Please forward any photos or location records to

Department of Conservation,
Auckland Area Office,
Private Bag 32026, Devonport,
North Shore City.

For further information contact
Auckland Area Office,
ph 09 445 9142 or
email: pbrown@doc.govt.nz.

Sarracenia pitcher plants
invading native vegetation in the
Waitakere ranges



The Department of Conservation promotes biodiversity conservation, historic conservation, the conservation experience, conservation partnerships and quality conservation management.