

JIM BOCKOWSKI (1943-2018)

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Jim Bockowski in his greenhouse. Photo by Tim Krug.

If you didn't know Jim Bockowski personally, you can thank him at least in part for the discovery and introduction of a number of carnivorous plants into cultivation, including the anthocyanin-free forms of *Sarracenia leucophylla*, *S. minor*, and *S. rubra* subsp. *gulfensis*, as well as the *Drosera* × *eloisiana* cultivar 'Nightmare'.

If you did know him, you were fortunate enough to be the beneficiary of his enthusiasm, his humor, his knowledge and experience and his generosity: in plants, in time, in hospitality, and in friendship.

A native of Staten Island, New York, Jim spent countless hours exploring the New Jersey Pine-lands in search of reptiles and carnivorous plants. And, as a paratrooper during the Vietnam War, he found – and fell in love with – *Nepenthes*.

His close friend, Bill Scholl, met Jim in the mid-1980s. "I was interested in the green (*S. rubra*) *gulfensis* he had discovered so I called him on the phone," he said. "Right away, Jim put one in a box and sent it to me. That was always his way. I don't think he ever sold a plant in his life."

With Bill, Jim traveled across the globe to see carnivorous plants in the wild; from Sumatra deep in the Apalachicola National Forest in Florida, to Sumatra deep in the rugged tropics of Indonesia. For this last example, Jim even tricked Bill into accepting a free trip to accompany him. "Jim called me and said 'I'm in a bind. I paid for (his longtime partner) Donna's trip and now she can't go,'" Bill recalled. "So it's all paid for." In the end, Donna did go – with the two of them.

And together, the pair traveled to South America three times to see *Heliophora*: Climbing Roraima and Ilu tepuis on two trips, and on the third being stranded in the town of San Francisco de Yuruani for four days by their helicopter pilot and “drinking every beer in the place,” said Bill.

I met Jim in 1995 in Virginia, at what would be the last of what was called the East Coast CP get togethers. I was new to the hobby and – like so many before and after – Jim took me under his wing, introducing me to the New Jersey Pinelands (and the overly-suspicious New Jersey Park Police) and offering plants, and advice, and more plants. I visited Jim numerous times at his house in Coney Island, Brooklyn, New York where he tried, repeatedly and unsuccessfully, to get me to accept boxes of cuttings of his favorite *Nepenthes* clones.

While nature has always seemed to be Jim’s life, at that time it was also his work, as a New York Parks Department supervisor. After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, Jim was the first person that many of the fleeing survivors saw as they escaped lower Manhattan across the Brooklyn Bridge, offering water and helping them wash the ash from their faces and hands.

After Jim retired, he and Donna moved to Tucson, Arizona where Jim struggled – and ultimately succeeded – in making his corner of the desert bloom. Friends Jason Ksepka and Perry Malouf both enjoyed his company in Arizona, watching the wildlife from his kitchen table: the birds at the feeders (and the rattlesnakes waiting there for a feathered meal) and the javelinas that would come to the door, or wandering through the Saguaro-covered hills just across the street.

“Jim treated me as an equal, even when I was an annoying 15-year-old kid,” Jason said. “He treated everybody like this.” Jason’s fondest memory of Jim is his laugh. “He would turn red in the face, squint his eyes, and bounce like Santa Claus.”

Perry made an annual pilgrimage from Maryland to stay with Jim and Donna in Arizona, to talk about their shared passion. “Though Jim didn’t have formal training as a botanist, he had such a keen observational sense and such experience in the field that he became very knowledgeable about the cultivation of these plants,” Perry said. “We would have discussions about various problems we’d experience: we’d talk about water quality and light and humidity, and we’d take turns trying to troubleshoot each other’s challenges. And sometimes we’d just sit in the greenhouse trimming plants.”

Tim Krug said “Jim was the co-discoverer of *Heliophora ionasi* “G” with Bill Baumgartl on Ilu tepui in 1992. When Bill and Jim returned to the U.S. from Venezuela, Bill gave his *H. ionasi* “G” to his mother Marie, who ran Marie’s Orchids in Florida. In “Sarraceniaceae of South America”, Andreas Wistuba specifically discussed Bill Baumgartl’s plant as not being *H. ionasi* “G”, but being really *H. arenicola*. Wistuba states that in 1988, he saw the same plants, in the same location, but did not obtain a specimen, or name the plant. So Bill and Jim were the first to introduce *H. arenicola* into cultivation.”



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