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How Venus fly traps developed a liking for meat – 17th May, 2020

Level 4

Research shows how carnivorous plants started to eat meat. A study Germany shows that small changes in genes led to some plants becoming carnivorous. This led to the development of some of nature's most creative species. Carnivorous plants developed new and clever ways to trap insects. The Venus fly trap's leaves snap shut when an insect crawls in. The pitcher plant has insides that insects cannot walk up. The sundew plant has long, sticky leaves.

A computational evolutionary biologist and a plant biologist worked on the research. They compared the genes of carnivorous plants to non-carnivorous ones. The meat-eating plants developed from the same plants 60 million years ago. A researcher said: "We were able to trace the origin of carnivorous genes back to a duplication event...many millions of years ago." Another researcher said the genes give plants the ability to sense and digest animals.

Level 5

New research suggests how carnivorous plants developed a taste for meat. A study from a university in Germany shows that small changes in the genetics of plants led to some of them becoming carnivorous. This led to the development of some of nature's most ingenious species. Carnivorous plants developed new and devious ways to snare insects. The Venus fly trap's clam-like leaves snap shut when an insect crawls between them. The pitcher plant has slippery insides that insects cannot crawl up. The sundew plant has long, sticky leaves that roll up when insects walk or fly on them.

Researchers who collaborated in the study included a computational evolutionary biologist and a plant biologist. They compared the genomes of carnivorous plants to non-carnivorous ones. They found that meat-eating plants developed from the same ancestor 60 million years ago. A researcher said: "We were able to trace the origin of carnivorous genes back to a duplication event that occurred many millions of years ago." Another researcher said: "The function of these genes is related to the ability to sense and digest animals and to utilise their nutrients."

Level 6

New research sheds light on how carnivorous plants like the Venus fly trap developed a taste for meat. A study from the University of Würzburg in Germany suggests that subtle changes in the genetics of plants led to some becoming carnivorous. These changes led to the development of some of nature's most ingenious species. Carnivorous plants adapted novel and devious ways to entice and snare insects. The Venus fly trap uses clam-like leaves that snap shut when an insect crawls between them. The pitcher plant is shaped like a vase - insects go inside and then cannot crawl up the slippery insides. The sundew plant has long sticky leaves, which roll up after insects get stuck on them.

Researchers in a variety of fields collaborated in the study. They included computational evolutionary biologist Jörg Schultz and plant biologist Rainer Hedrich. They sequenced and compared the genomes of carnivorous plants to non-carnivorous plants. They discovered that meat-eating plants developed from the same common ancestor about 60 million years ago. Dr Schultz said: "We were able to trace the origin of carnivorous genes back to a duplication event that occurred many millions of years ago in the genome of the last common ancestor of the carnivorous species." Dr Rainer* added: "The function of these genes is related to the ability to sense and digest animals and to utilise their nutrients."

* CORRECTION: This should be Dr Hedrich (Apologies Dr Hedrich)