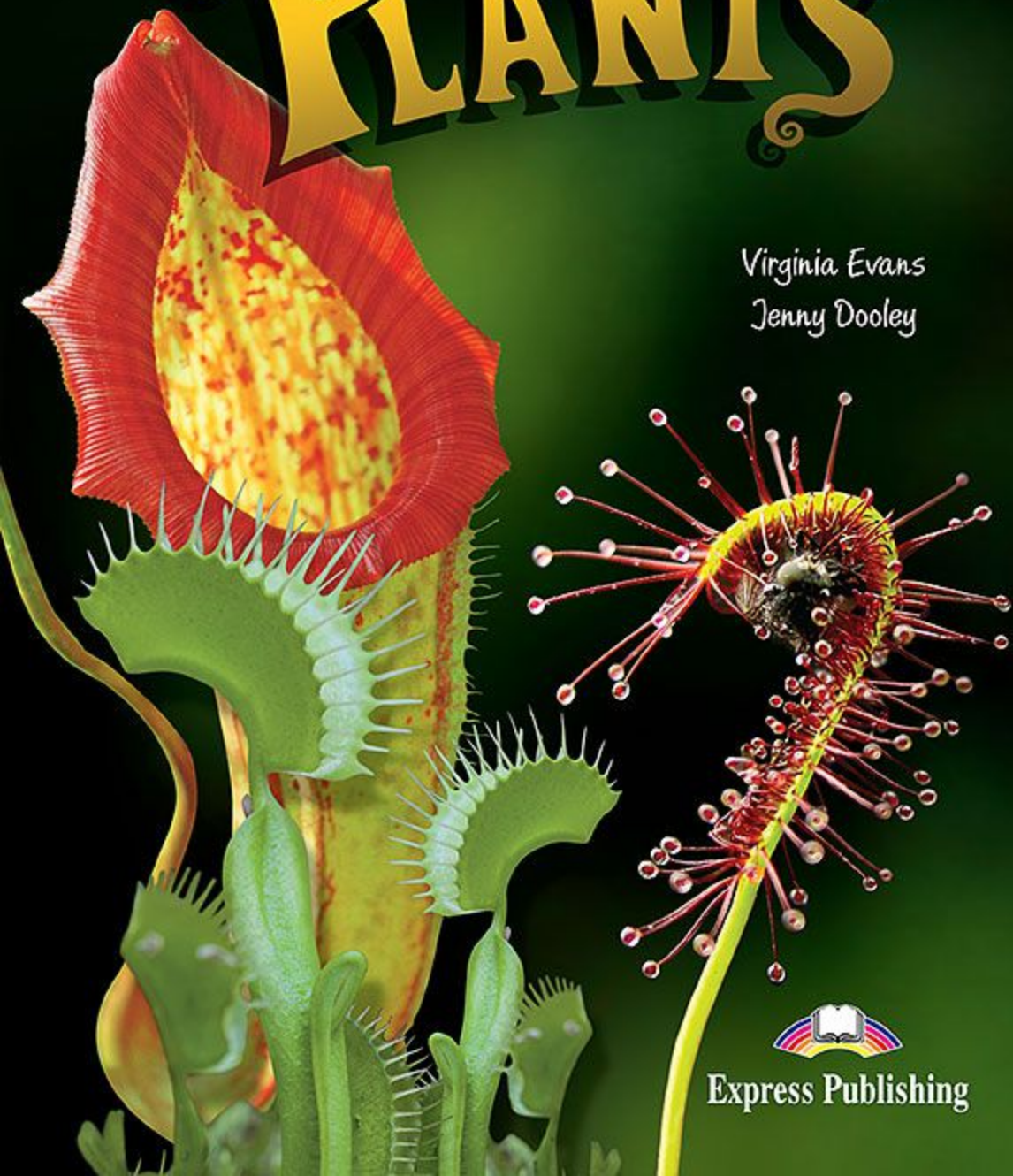


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# CARNIVOROUS PLANTS

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Plants adapt to environments in many ways. These adaptations make certain plants unique and contribute to the variety of species in the plant kingdom. Many plants grow in areas where the soil does not provide enough nutrients. This forces them to find other ways of getting food. One very strange solution to this problem has led to carnivorous plants – plants that eat animals! Interestingly, different types of these plants use different methods to catch their prey. Examples of carnivorous plants include Venus flytraps, pitcher plants, sundews, butterworts and bladderworts.



There are 400 known species of carnivorous plants.



# The Venus Flytrap

## Mealtime in the Swamps

A fly wings through the swampland in the southeastern United States. Hungry, the creature smells nectar and follows the smell to the red leaf near the ground. By crawling across this leaf, the fly is making a deadly mistake.

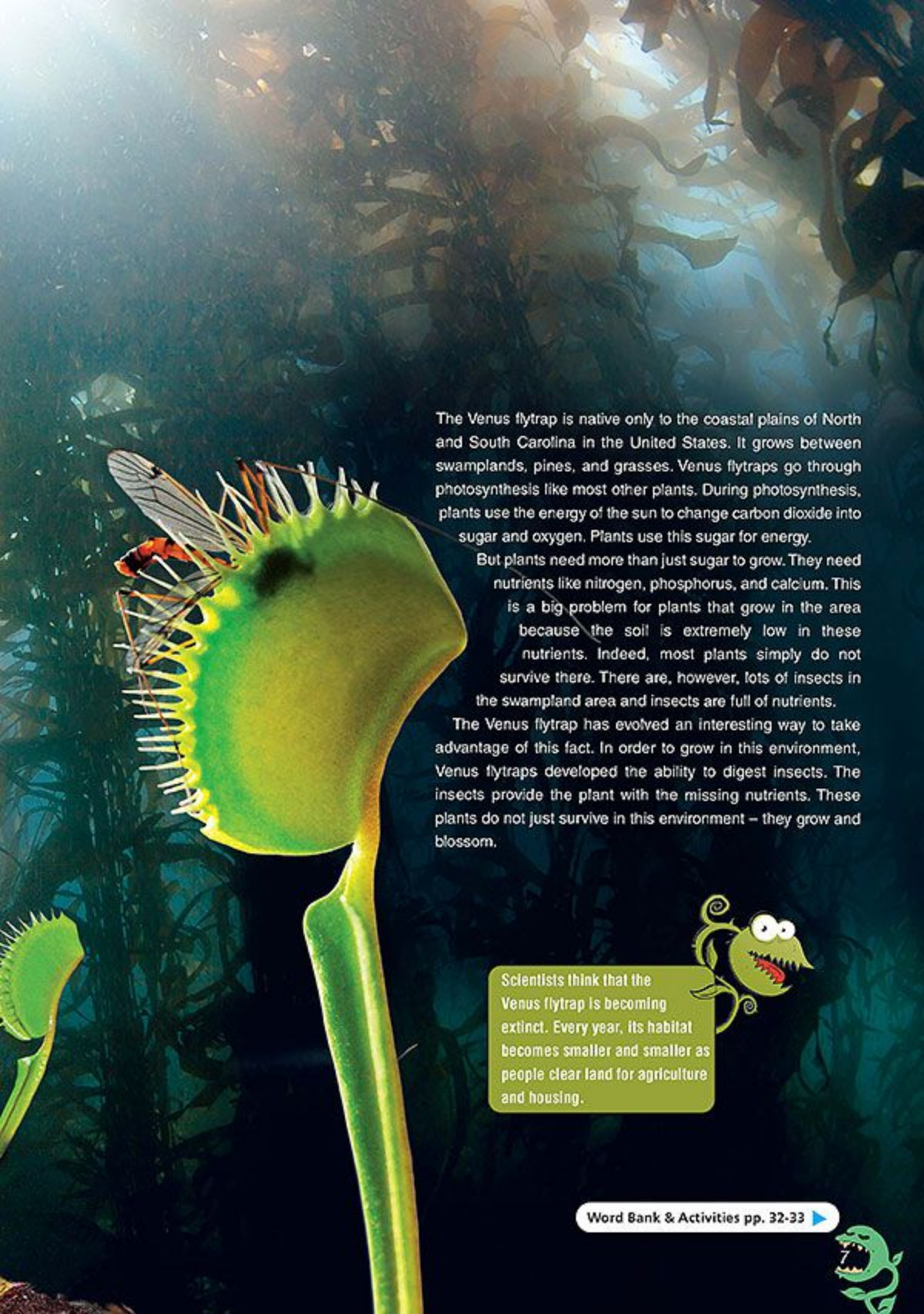
The fly, expecting a sweet treat, brushes against hairs growing from the surface of the leaf. The leaf closes around the fly and traps it in an instant. Spines around the outer edge of the leaf come together like teeth, preventing escape. As the insect struggles to break free, the walls close in tighter and release a sticky chemical. The fly dies quickly. Soon, the chemicals begin to dissolve the bug's insides. After several days of digestion, the leaf opens, and all that is left of the fly is a dry, hollow shell.

The unsuspecting fly was a victim of the Venus flytrap. This weird plant is carnivorous – it eats the flesh of insects and spiders. Its leaves snap shut in the blink of an eye. And once they shut, very few insects escape from them.



Venus Flytraps require nutrient-poor soil. Adding fertilizer to the soil will kill the plants.





The Venus flytrap is native only to the coastal plains of North and South Carolina in the United States. It grows between swamplands, pines, and grasses. Venus flytraps go through photosynthesis like most other plants. During photosynthesis, plants use the energy of the sun to change carbon dioxide into sugar and oxygen. Plants use this sugar for energy.

But plants need more than just sugar to grow. They need nutrients like nitrogen, phosphorus, and calcium. This is a big problem for plants that grow in the area because the soil is extremely low in these nutrients. Indeed, most plants simply do not survive there. There are, however, lots of insects in the swampland area and insects are full of nutrients.

The Venus flytrap has evolved an interesting way to take advantage of this fact. In order to grow in this environment, Venus flytraps developed the ability to digest insects. The insects provide the plant with the missing nutrients. These plants do not just survive in this environment – they grow and blossom.



Scientists think that the Venus flytrap is becoming extinct. Every year, its habitat becomes smaller and smaller as people clear land for agriculture and housing.

