

Southern African Bulb Group www.sabg.tk

SABG Newsletter no. 40 August 2019

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News

The 2019 Bulb and Seed Exchange is in progress. A complete list of species available and instructions for making requests have been sent to SABG members. A summary is included below.

We have booked two well-known and popular speakers for future SABG meetings: Christine Skelmersdale in Autumn 2019 and James Hitchmough in Autumn 2020.

Dates for your diary

* Saturday 31st August 2019: Deadline for Bulb & Seed Exchange requests

** Sunday 6th October 2019: SABG Autumn Meeting, Winchester

** Saturday 12th October 2019: NAAS Nerine visit day, Exbury Gardens

** Sunday 29th March 2020: SABG Spring Meeting (Hale, Farnham, Surrey)

★ Sunday 11th October 2020: SABG Autumn Meeting

From the Editor

In this issue of the SABG Newsletter you will find ten photographs of South African bulbs exhibited at recent Alpine Garden Society shows and photographed by Jon Evans. He makes a strong case later in these pages to encourage you to attend and even exhibit in AGS shows, and he sent me the photographs to prove how worthwhile that can be. They are captioned with the species name followed by the owner or exhibitor.

Notices and Requests

SABG Bulb and Seed Exchange 2019

As mentioned, Jon Evans is at the time of writing hard at work carrying out his annual Bulb & Seed Exchange. As a record, here is part of Jon's announcement:

[The notice] listed all bulb and seed donations, including items promised to be available shortly. As always our members have once again been very generous with their surplus material and time. Please do remember many seeds and bulbs/corms are in extremely short supply. Whilst we will try to fulfil all

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requests, it is hard to split a single bulb six different ways. Species are listed [in the notice] using the names provided by the suppliers. In a few cases, the spelling of names has been corrected, but as a voluntary organisation with limited resources, please bear in mind that we are not able to check the accuracy of these identifications. Species of *Polyxena* are now classified as *Lachenalia*.



Polyxena corymbosa, RHS Wisley [Jon Evans]

On receipt of the list, please send your wishlist to me, Jon Evans, 46 Upper Way, Farnham, Surrey, GU9 8RF, UK, or to jonevans46.uw@btinternet.com. There is no limit to how many items you may request. Please try to get your requests back to me by 31st August, as I will start dispatching items in early September.

- Please order by using the numbers alongside the descriptions.
- If you want a particular species but don't care which donation, just give the name of the plant and 'Bulb' or 'Seed'.
- Remember to add your postal address.

If you are a UK or Overseas member and have not donated bulbs or seed, the Committee expects you to make a donation to cover the cost of postage and packing. Please make cheques drawn on a UK bank or UK postal orders payable to "SABG". And please no postage stamps. Overseas members may find it helpful to be able to pay via PayPal. We cannot accept credit or debit card payments, but if you have a PayPal account you can donate to 'paypal@sabg.tk' or use a web browser to go to 'paypal.me/sabgtk'.

Jon Evans

There is just about time for members to send him any last-minute requests. The full list of bulbs and seeds available was sent by email or by post to members on 18th August. If for any reason you have lost the list, please email Jon or Richard a.s.a.p. (email addresses at the end of this Newsletter as usual).

Jon and all the members who took the trouble to donate bulbs and seeds for the Exchange are to be congratulated again on making possible this annual exercise. Their generosity with their time and material has made this one of the Group's most eagerly awaited activities. I therefore list the donors of bulbs and seeds in a "Hall of Fame" – thank you to you all!

Ashley Allshire, Audrey Cain, Alina Hughes, Anthony Murphy, Aiko Talens, Barry Maslin, Ben Turner, Dustrin Chen, Erle Randall, George Elder, Helen Mount, Jackie Bannister, Jon Evans, Jonny Hartnell, John Lee, Jeremy Spon, John Weagle, Les Pearcy, Mick Bailey, Neil Hubbard, Neil Hyde, Paul Cumbleton, Robert Counsell, Rimmer DeVries, Roland Ludwig, Ralph Martin.



Hessea stellaris, George Elder [Jon Evans]

New Book: "Secrets of Namaqualand Succulents" by Florent Grenier

Do not be put off by the title of this book, because the author is equally interested in the geophytes and succulents of Namaqualand, in fact much of his research has been done on tuberous pelargoniums and Irids. A French version of this book has already been published, but an English version is due to be released in the late summer of 2019. I have seen the French version and have made comments on the text for the English version and I believe that this will be a very useful addition to the library of anyone interested in the succulent plants and bulbs of Namaqualand.

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It gives a wealth of background information on the plants that we love to grow and tells us about the different habitats, ecology, climate, etc. experienced by those plants. There is also much new information about pollinators and their interactions with various species, particularly geophytic ones.

Florent is a young French ecologist who has spent a lot of time conducting research in Namaqualand and has accumulated many images which have been used to profusely illustrate the book, you would have problems finding other images of some of these species. I highly recommend the book and you can pre-order on Florent's website https://namaqualand-succulents.com/

Terry Smale



Empodium flexile, Bob & Rannveig Wallis [Jon Evans]

SABG meetings

Report on the October 2018 SABG meeting

About 39 people attended the SABG meeting on 7th October 2018, which was a bit of a tight squeeze in our usual venue, the Badger Farm Community Centre near Winchester.

In the morning we had a talk by our Chairman Paul Cumbleton on the cultivation of South African bulbs in the UK. Here I include some notes that I made during his talk.

Cultivation

Different people can perfectly sensibly have different ways to grow their plants, depending on their local climate and growing conditions. You can adapt your methods as you gain experience with the way your plants grow in your environment. Paul grows his South African bulbs in Somerset in a greenhouse behind a new crevice garden, with two other greenhouses devoted to Fritillaries and general plant raising.

Most S. African bulbs grow in very brightly lit conditions, so give them the maximum possible sunlight to reduce etiolation (tall thin weak growth when light is insufficient). Regarding the possibility of enhancing brightness with artificial light, fluorescent tubes are probably not bright enough, but LEDs or growlights might be worth investigating. However, it can be expensive to cover a whole glasshouse, or even just a bench, and large lamps may not help much if they also block out some of the sunlight! (I am considering using mirror panels in a lean-to conservatory, especially in winter.)

Ventilation is important: alpine houses for example usually have lots of louvres at bench level to promote a good flow of air over the plants. This not only reduces the temperature if too high (most plants stop growing at 25C or above), but can also reduce humidity (greater transpiration will increase the circulation of water within the plant, potentially aiding growth while reducing etiolation). Fans can be used to increase air movement, as used by orchid growers. Paul uses cheap office fans on 24 hours a day and just replaces them when they die – he said he thought it wasn't worth spending a lot on expensive greenhouse fans!

Temperature-wise, it's best to keep plants just frost-free for safety. The BioGreen Phoenix or Hotbox Elite tubular fan heaters cost around £200, so Paul uses much cheaper 3kW fan heaters (£38 from eBay), which he said last just as long. He has his plugged into a separate thermostat, rather than using the built-in one. It's important to choose one where the temperature at which it switches *on* is reliable and accurate – some types are marked with the temperature at which they switch *off* and won't switch on until the temperature is a lot lower, which risks allowing frost when the temperature is dropping rapidly. It's important that the switch-on and switch-off temperatures are close, otherwise electricity may be wasted if the heater has to be set to a higher temperature to compensate.

Paul uses plastic pots mostly, except for his *Gethyllis* collection which he grows in clay pots sunk in a sand plunge. Many South African bulbs like lots of water while they are actively growing, so plastic pots are usually fine. As a general principle you need to adjust your watering regime to suit the types of pots and compost you use, rather than follow rigid rules.

It was suggested (by Jon Evans I think) to try to avoid watering with hard tap water, and water utilities can make it alkaline even if it's soft to begin with, so adding a few drops of acid can counteract this. Citric acid can be obtained from eBay, and vinegar or descaling compounds were also suggested. Don't overdo it – pH 6 is what to aim for. Measure the pH after a trial addition and then be consistent at each watering.

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Originally Paul used compost mixed from 1 part John Innes no. 2, 1 part peat and 2 parts coarse grit. Now he just uses equal parts of J.I. no. 2 and coarse (2-6mm) grit. But he makes his own John Innes, omitting the peat specified in the original formula. He buys sterilised "cricket loam" from turf suppliers, which is fairly consistent (he uses Mendip Loam), and adds the other ingredients: see the Wisley blog¹ for his instructions. Make sure the loam hasn't had green waste added.

In fact a free-draining structure is more important than the actual materials. For example, the grit can be replaced by Perlite. Some people use pure Tesco low-dust cat litter, or mix Perlite or sand with it. If entirely inert composts like these are used, feeding is essential. An audience suggestion was to mix the cat-litter with John Innes to make it better at holding water.

Watering for winter-growing bulbs should start in the first week of September, after which they should never be allowed to dry out, until watering is stopped in late spring when the leaves start yellowing. Keep them dry all summer. Exceptions to this rule include Bulbinellas, which need lots of water when growing and a little in summer, say once a month, to stop the roots shrivelling.

Some bulbs which are dormant in summer can get baked too much if left in the sun – cover the pots to keep them cooler or move them under the bench. Massonias for example may keep live roots all year round.

South African bulbs need less feeding than other bulbs, perhaps given at half-strength once every couple of months – about four times during the growing season, although some people give more or less than this. Gladiolus may need more, for example, which agreed with a comment from the audience that corms seem to need more feeding than bulbs. Low-phosphorus fertilisers are best – Gordon Summerfield apparently recommended a 13-5-20 NPK ratio, but the exact ratio isn't critical. Paul said that at Wisley they used Scotts "Peters" professional fertilisers because they are purer than garden centre fertilisers and don't contain insoluble gunge which blocks watering can roses. He mentioned their "CalMag" which contains calcium and magnesium which can be in short supply if your water source is soft.

There was some discussion of whether to avoid ureabased fertilisers – I'm not sure why this was: perhaps they may produce unpleasant ammonia or contain too much nitrogen (a pure urea fertiliser as used in agriculture contains no other useful elements and is therefore unsuitable for pot use).

An audience member reported good experience with Miracle Grow, although I notice its NPK formula of 24-8-16 is a bit heavier in nitrogen than Gordon's recommendation, possibly leading to excess leaf growth rather than flowers. (I use Miracle Grow Azalea food which at 16-6-16 is closer to Summerfield. A tomato fertiliser might be even better, with less nitrogen, and Chempak's Tomato Food at 11-9-30 has good reviews.)

Paul re-pots most of his bulbs every year, except for *Gethyllis* which seem to dislike being disturbed. Repotting is a chance to see how the bulbs are doing, and avoids the compost settling and becoming too dense.



Haemanthus coccineus var. coarctatus, Jon Evans [Jon Evans]

Propagation

Silverhill's, Summerfield, African Bulbs and the SABG Exchange are good sources of seeds. You can of course collect your own seeds. To ensure good germination, keep seeds in a warm place such as a living room until you sow them in September, not in the fridge. Or hedge your bets by splitting seed batches into two and keeping half in the fridge to sow the following year. Terry

http://www.srgc.org.uk/wisley/2008/280808/log.html [see also https://www.alpinegardensociety.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Choosing-a-Potting-Compost-Paul-Cumbleton-2016.pdf]

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Smale reported that even 25-year-old *Gladiolus* seeds showed some germination. Sow in 50:50 John Innes and grit, without any fertiliser. Seeds may take about six weeks to germinate, placed outside in a cool spot, but bring into the greenhouse once germinated and before the first frosts. Newly germinated bulb seedlings can look like grass, so be careful when weeding! Prick out after one to two years, depending on whether they are crowded: Paul puts several in each pot for growing on, then larger species into individual pots later. Many South African bulbs can flower quite early, in their third or even second year.

Exceptions to this general regime include *Eriospermum* seed which is short-lived and should be sown fresh from the plant. *Lapeirousia* are also best sown before they are too old – September is OK, but not the following year. Most Amaryllid seeds are short-lived. Comments from the audience suggested they can be kept in the fridge to extend the storage period for a while, and should be soaked in water overnight before sowing, especially if already germinating.

Brunsvigia seeds can be sown on the surface, but some, such as B. pulchra, can take a long time before they flower; don't repot them very often as they resent disturbance. Terry said that doing so straight after flowering is best. Gethyllis can be treated like Brunsvigia in many ways. Remove the seeds from the pod when the previously upright stalk falls over, remove some of the goo and sow them straight away. Paul puts some grit or gravel on top after the seeds begin to germinate.



Massonia pygmaea subsp. pygmaea, George Elder [Jon Evans]

Benefits from growing plants from seeds include: (i) many plants can be obtained more cheaply; (ii) if you sow your own seed over repeated generations, they will adapt to your conditions; (iii) interesting variations can appear. Examples of the latter shown by Paul in his photos included variation in the amount of leaf spotting in *Eucomis vandermerwei*, a variegated *Massonia pseudoechinata* and *M. depressa* with nice markings.

Flower colour can also vary in Massonias grown from seed. A *Gladiolus uysiae* had a most unusual symmetrical flower.

Turning to vegetative propagation, bulbils can appear on the ends of stolons, or bulbs can sometimes split or produce offsets. *Massonia sempervirens* does this quite often. Paul thought this was happening more than usual during the summer (2018) and suspected the hot weather might have caused it.

He showed some photos of an experiment he had carried out, growing plants outside their pots, directly in the sand plunge bed, and adding a top dressing of Hydroleca (baked clay granules), obtained cheaply from Woodland Horticulture in Somerset. This seemed to work well with Massonias, whose single large bulbs are easy to handle, and he also tried smaller bulbs such as *Polyxena* where normally several are grown together in a pot, plus a lovely compact form of *Strumaria* watermeyeri subsp. botteskloofensis, Nerines, Empodiums, etc. There were no labels in the experimental bed!



Strumaria watermeyeri, George Elder
[Jon Evans]

Pests

Mice are Paul's worst pests. We saw a photograph of a cute (or maybe not so cute) long-tailed field mouse. As the plants are winter growing, other pests are not too common, but aphids and thrips appear, for which he uses biological control (Thripex-Plus, which contains the thrips-eating mite *Neoseiulus cucumeris*) during the summer when other plants are growing. Botrytis mould can appear on fading flowers, especially in Massonias. A mystery disease appeared last year, which caused shrivelled portions of leaves, but a fungicide stopped it straight away.

Hybrids

Hybrids are a matter for personal choice – some people won't grow them. Massonias are very promiscuous, so home-collected seeds are often hybrids. To prevent

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this, put small net bags over the flowers and pollinate them by hand. Terry mentioned that Western Flower Thrips can effect cross-pollination, so it may be better to move plants in flower to another location. The yellow and red forms of *Daubenya aurea* can cross, some of the progeny being a nice orange colour. Self-sown hybrid seedlings may pop up of their own accord-we saw an example which may have been a *Hessea*, followed by two deliberately made crosses, *Gethyllis villosa* × *G. roggeveldensis* and *Brunsvigia orientalis* × *B. bosmaniae*. The latter produced a very nice flower-after ten years! Terry Smale commented that these two species can grow next to each other in the wild, but don't cross naturally because *B. bosmaniae* is pollinated by bees and *B. orientalis* is bird-pollinated.



Brunsvigia bosmaniae, George Elder [Jon Evans]

The main event in the afternoon was a talk by Paul on the hardiness of South African bulbs when grown in the UK. This will be summarised in the next Newsletter, but remember that an article by Paul summarising his experiments and the results of his survey of SABG members appeared in SABG Newsletter no. 39²

Report on the April 2019 SABG meeting

Kit Strange from the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew gave us a practical demonstration of how tender bulbs are grown at Kew, followed by some questions from members and discussion of related topics. An account will appear in the next Newsletter.



Nerine filifolia, Peter Farkasch [Jon Evans]

The next SABG meeting

Our next meeting will be held on **Sunday 6th October 2019** at our normal venue, the Badger Farm Community Centre near Winchester. Directions are shown on our web-site at www.sabg.tk/meetings.html. The doors will open at 10.00, and the meeting will close about 14.30.

The speaker for the morning session is Christine Skelmersdale, who will talk about "The summer flowering bulbs of the Drakensberg Mountains, South Africa". After the lunch break, Jon Evans will talk on "South African bulbs from the AGS shows".

As usual, there will be a display table for any plants that you bring along for others to see. We will have time for some informal discussion during the afternoon, so that members can point out their plants and answer any questions. If you have any slides or computer images that you would like to show, please bring them along.

There will also be a sales table where you can offer material (plants, bulbs, seeds and maybe a few books) for sale on the usual 80:20 basis, i.e. the Group takes a 20% commission to help cover the hall hire costs etc. Please include a second label in each pot, showing the price and your initials, so that we can settle up easily at the end of the day.

There will be a lunch break from approximately 12.00 until 13.00. For those of you that have not come before, it's worth adding that many Members bring their own food so that they can stay in the hall and have the opportunity to chat to others and pore over the display and sales plants. Alternatively, the Sainsbury's supermarket is based on the same site.

As usual, the charge for the meeting will be £3.00 per person, payable on entry. There is no charge for

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parking, provided that you remember to add your car registration number to the list, usually in the main entrance hall and on the table just inside the entrance to our meeting room, to avoid any fine for over-staying.



Oxalis hirta 'Gothenburg', Ivor Betteridge
[Jon Evans]

SABG Spring 2020 meeting

The Spring meeting will be on **Sunday 29th March 2020**. Because the usual meeting room in Winchester is rather small for the numbers who attend, we have booked an alternative venue for this meeting, as an experiment. We will meet at the Hale Institute Village Hall, near Farnham, Surrey. There will be more space and we hope that more members from further north will be able to attend, while hopefully not losing too many people who have to travel from the south-west. More details of the location and how to find it will be distributed later.

At present, we have booked the Autumn 2020 meeting back at the Badger Farm Community Centre in Winchester, on **Sunday 11th October 2020**. However, we will ask members for their preferences and if necessary we might move this meeting to Farnham also. Professor James Hitchmough of the Department of Landscape Architecture at Sheffield University is scheduled to give us two talks at that meeting. His studies concern the ecology of herbaceous vegetation and how this can be used to create more sustainable plantings in town environments. He is known for designing the plantings in the 2012 London Olympics surroundings, and the "South African meadows" at

Wisley which have appeared in issues 33³ and 38⁴ of this newsletter. More details of the meeting will follow in due course.

Bulbils

AGS Autumn shows

We are approaching the season of the autumn Alpine Garden Society shows. These are well worth visiting; you will see a hall full of magnificent plants, and rooms full of tables with tempting pots for sale. Amongst these, you may well find some wonderful specimens of autumn-flowering South African bulbs, for a small number of dedicated exhibitors persist in bringing these to shows, despite the prevailing sentiment among many of the judges that they are not very hardy. This can weigh against them in competition in the classes in which they are usually exhibited – for bulbous plants, where they contend with *Crocus*, autumn *Narcissus*, *Scilla* and early snowdrops – or for plants from the Southern Hemisphere, where they might encounter high mountain cushions and *Celmisia* from New Zealand.

Despite all this, plants from a number of South African genera have become familiar exhibits at these shows, including *Brunsvigia*, *Cyrtanthus*, *Empodium*, *Gladiolus*, *Haemanthus*, *Hessea*, *Massonia*, *Nerine*, *Polyxena/Lachenalia*, *Strumaria*, and *Oxalis*, which of course are not considered bulbs by the Alpine Garden Society because they are not monocots.

One of our members, Peter Farkasch, has been campaigning actively to expand the opportunities for entering South African bulbs, and has succeeded in getting a class for "bulbous plants from the Southern Hemisphere" added to the Loughborough Autumn Show on September 28th. This will only flourish, and be extended to other shows, if it is well-supported. So I would encourage all of you to visit your nearest show, because they can be very enjoyable events, and in particular I would encourage those of you who are members of the Alpine Garden Society to consider entering your best plants at one of the shows⁵.

Jon Evans

Jon sent me a number of photographs of South African plants he has photographed at these shows. Indeed, he is an official AGS show photographer and the quality of his photos is self-evident. They will also I hope whet your appetite for the talk he is planning to give in the afternoon at our next meeting on 6th October. I therefore make no apology for scattering his images around this newsletter!

³ https://sabg.tk/newsletter:sabgnews33.pdf

^{4 &}lt;u>https://sabg.tk/newsletter:sabgnews38.pdf</u>

⁵ https://www.alpinegardensociety.net/show-schedule/

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Oxalis lobata, Bob & Rannveig Wallis [Jon Evans]

IBSA (the Indigenous Bulb Association of South Africa)

I have just received a copy of the latest IBSA Bulletin (no. 61, July 2019) and what an excellent publication it is! Of course it includes tributes to Rachel and Rod Saunders, Cameron McMaster and Bill Squire, plus an account of the 2017 Symposium held at Goudini Spa near Worcester, South Africa. While preparing a talk for the Southampton BCSS branch I realised that I had taken a photograph at the 2017 Symposium which included all four of those mentioned. Although it is not a very good photo (it was taken in a darkened lecture room, forgetting to adjust the camera sensitivity), I include it at the end of this Newsletter.

The Bulletin also contains scientific articles, practical experiences, field trips, book reviews, references to new species publications and lots of colour photographs. Many of you will already be members – I have now joined!

In the next Newsletter

I plan to produce the next Newsletter (no. 41) for distribution in Autumn 2019. Do let me know of anything you would like to be included.

SABG Committee

Chairman

Paul Cumbleton <u>cumbleton@yahoo.co.uk</u>

Bulb & seed exchange

Jonathan Evans jonevans46.uw@btinternet.com

Treasurer

Rodney Sims rodney.sims@tiscali.co.uk

Secretary & Membership

Alina Hughes abmhughes@gmail.com

Newsletter & Web editor, Committee minutes Richard White <u>sabq@rjwhite.tk</u>

Meeting supplies

Sue Bedwell bedwell615@btinternet.com



Cameron McMaster and Bill Squire (on left); Rachel and Rod Saunders (on right) at Goudini Spa, 28 August 2017

[Richard White]

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SABG Income and Expenditure Account for year ending 30th September 2018

Income	2018			2017	
Membership Fees Catering Pot sales Bulb sales 2017 Plant Sales Bulb sales 2018 Admission Donations Account Interest	£80.97 £27.24 £15.90 £100.90 £215.94 £646.58 £213.00 £2.57	ļ	Membership Fees Catering Bulb Sales 2016 Book Commission Plant Sales Bulb sales 2017 Admission Donations Account Interest	£42.75 £28.87 £418.73 £246.75 £186.65 £355.12 £182.00 £4.35	
Total Income	£1,303.10				£1,465.22
Expenditure					
Hall Rental Speakers Catering Costs Bulb Distribution costs Stationery Printing Repay Creditors Postage Web site Affiliation Insurance Commission refund Research Donation	£170.52 £50.00 £10.65 £241.04 £0.00 £35.69 £347.60 £31.04 £0.00 £110.00 £200.00	Bulb	Hall Rental Speakers Catering Costs Distribution Postage Stationery Printing Repay Creditors Postage Web site Affiliation Insurance Commission refund	£164.50 £215.00 £28.87 £149.26 £0.00 £174.00 £248.61 £0.00 £107.79 £105.00 £8.60	04.004.00
Total Expenditure	£1,196.54				£1,201.63
Profit/Loss		£106.56			£263.59
Balance Brought Forward Add Profit/Subtract Loss Creditor- expenses due Balance Carried Forward	2018	2018 £2,670.55 £106.56 £149.52 £2,926.63	2017 £2,030.49 £292.46 £347.60 £2,670.55		
Represented By Cash in Hand Cheques not paid in Treasurer's Savings Account Paypal Account		£23.00 £373.00 £2,208.96 £321.67 £2,926.63	£97.46 £0.00 £2,350.97 £222.12 £2,670.55		
I hereby certify that I have duly examin vouchers etc. of the Southern African represent a true and accurate record.					

Signed Date 21/12/20

David Wilson MBA