

The Southern African Bulb Group

Newsletter No. 1

Autumn 2004



Introduction

The Southern African Bulb Group was initiated by a group of enthusiasts on April 4th 2004. The objective of the group is to further the understanding of the cultivation of Southern African bulbs, where 'bulbs' is used in the broad sense to encompass bulb-, corm- and tuber- possessing Southern African plants, including 'dicots' such as *Oxalis*. In the first instance the group will be run on an informal basis, with an initial subscription of £5 invited from participants.

The following four individuals have agreed to serve as an interim committee:

Robin Attrill (Membership secretary and Newsletter editor)

Margaret Corina (Treasurer)

Stefan Rau

Terry Smale

This first issue of the newsletter contains details of the next meeting of the group, to be held at David Victors home on 23rd October 2004, a summary of a discussion held at the initial meeting concerning the acclimatisation of Southern African bulbs to the Northern Hemisphere growth Cycle, part 1 of a survey of literature relating to Southern African bulbs, and a list of suppliers of seed and bulbs/corms of Southern African geophytes.

The group welcomes articles, and suggestions, for inclusion in future newsletters.

Contributions (handwritten, typewritten and electronic are acceptable!) should be sent to the newsletter editor at 17 Waterhouse Moor, Harlow, Essex, CM18 6BA (Email

Robin@rattrill.freemove.co.uk)

Details of next meeting

The next meeting of the group will be at David and Pat Victor's home on Saturday, 23rd October, 2004. The meeting will start at 11.00 hours and will probably continue until ~16.00 hours. The meeting will include looking at the plants (see below), as well as a discussion about various subjects of interest.

David has an extensive collection of South African bulbs, including a broad range of Irids and Amaryllids, as well as lesser known genera, such as *Oxalis* and tuberous *Pelargonium*. He also has a broad collection of South American geophytes, including *Bomarea* and *Tropaeolum*. Of course, there is always a risk that all of them may choose not to flower at the time of the meeting! In that event, he also has a couple of acres of garden, packed with a wide range of interesting plants.

If you would like to attend the meeting, please let David know by any of the following means:

Phone: 01525 210633

Fax: 01525 210070

e-mail: davidxvictor@mailblocks.com

letter: The Old Stables, Church Lane, Hockliffe, Beds., LU7 9NL

David has kindly offered to provide light refreshments (tea/coffee/biscuits etc) but is not in a position to offer full lunches to an undetermined number of people. So, please bring anything beyond basics for your lunch.

It is easy to get to David and Pat's by car so long as you follow the following directions, provided by David, exactly! 'You should aim for the cross roads of the A5 and A4012 in Hockliffe village (between Dunstable and Milton Keynes and 6 miles west of junctions 12 and 13 of the M1). From here proceed west towards Leighton Buzzard. After 300 yards, turn right into Goose Green towards Church End. At the Church, take the left branch. Follow the lane, past a large, ugly house on the right (we are behind it!), down the hill, sharp right, and go past a farm house on the left by 50 yards. On the right you will see the bottom of a drive, with kerb corners, but you will not see the house as it is over the top of the hill. At the top, take the left side.'

Attendees are encouraged to bring along their own plants of interest for display, and to bring along spare seeds/bulbs to the meeting for sale or free distribution.

Acclimatisation of Southern African Bulbs - Transferring South African Geophytes to the Northern Hemisphere growth Cycle

The following account is a very concise summary account of a discussion held at the April 4th initial meeting referred to in the introduction. Comments are welcomed on the summary below for inclusion in future newsletters.

Growing from seed.

For most winter-growing species the best (and cheapest!) option is growing from seed, with appropriate deferred sowing to synchronise plants on to the northern seasonal cycle.

- Especially suitable for most Iridaceae, Hyacinthaceae, and *Pelargonium*.
- Ensuring adequate day/night temperature differential when sowing is important
- Ensuring adequate light levels very important in first growing season to allow critical mass of dormant corm/bulb to be achieved.

There are, however, a number of problematic winter growers –

- Amaryllids – It is difficult to defer germination for many due to short viability and/or spontaneous germination, but generally it is easy to extend initial growth period to accommodate this and hence ‘synchronise’ the plants.
- Montane species, eg *Romulea hantamensis*. - Stratification strategies are clearly advantageous in some cases, but precise requirements are not well understood.
- *Oxalis* - Transient viability in most taxa is an issue, but bulb production typically high so not a major problem.

Summer growers are in the main similarly straightforward to propagate from seed. The same issues as occur with winter-growers for certain taxa, especially Amaryllids, also apply to summer growers, particularly the first item detailed above, and are best dealt with using similar strategies.

Growing from bulbs and corms.

This is a viable option for most taxa....subject to sources being available! Extension of growing period is best option –two cycles (~18 months) typically leads to full synchronisation. Temperature control to bring forward/hold back growth initiation is possible for some, but generally some negative effect on the plants, particularly corms. Larger bulbs/corms most easily accommodated

Other approaches include.....

- Grow on the 'wrong cycle' – plants tend to show tendency to revert to their natural cycle, eg *Sparaxis*, *Ixia*, *Lachenalia* etc
- New propagation options. Limited experience shows bulbils *ex Lachenalia* leaf cuttings tend to synchronise immediately, and meristem culture may have an application.

As stated above, feedback on the above is welcome. In addition any experience of the use of smoke treatment, especially comparative germination with/without the use of smoke treatment is welcome.

Suppliers of Southern African Bulbs and Wants List

A list of six sources of is given below. If you have experience of other reliable sources please send details for inclusion in a future expanded list. In addition future issues of the newsletter will contain a wants list – please send details of those elusive plants that you have been seeking.....other members of the group may be able to assist!

UK based suppliers

- Monocot Nursery (St Michaels, Littleton, Somerton, Somerset, TA11 6NT, UK)
(Seed and bulbs of selected species)
- Jim & Jenny Archibald ('Bryn Collen, Ffostrasol, Llandysul, SA44 5SB, Wales, UK)
(Seed of selected species. catalogue online at <http://www.jjaseeds.com/>)
- Terry Smale (28 St. Leonards Rd, Epsom Downs, Surrey, KT18 5RH, UK)
An interesting selection of Southern African taxa offered by a member of this group - Catalog online at <http://www.smale1.demon.co.uk/index.htm>

South African suppliers

- Silverhill Seeds (PO Box 53108, Kenilworth, 7745, Cape Town, RSA)
(Extensive range of seed, catalogue online at www.silverhillseeds.co.za)
- Rust-en-Vrede Nursery (PO Box 753, Brackenfell, 7561, RSA)
(Seed and corms)
- Gordon Summerfield (PO Box 5150, Helderberg, Somerset West, 7135, RSA)
(Seed and corms, many with provenance data)

In addition to the above society seed distribution schemes including those of the International Bulb Society, the Botanical Society of South Africa, the Indigenous Bulb Association of South Africa, the Alpine Garden Society and the North American Rock

Garden Society can be productive sources of material.....although the identity of the resulting plants may not match the name on the seed packet in every case!