

The Southern African Bulb Group

Newsletter No. 28 -- September, 2014



From the Editor

David Victor

Well, we are now nearing the end of summer, autumn awaits and winter is only just around the corner. However, those of us that grow winter rainfall plants have little to concern us as the first signs of the coming season are now starting to show. My favourite at this time of the year is *Haemanthus coccineus*, where my prime pan has, as you can see below, already sprung into flower:



With delights like this to look forward to, who could be depressed by thoughts of winter?

By now, you should all have received this year's bulb and seed list from Alice. If not, please email her at the address shown at the end of the newsletter.

However, do note that requests for material should be addressed to Bill, who will deal with them on return from his visit to South Africa, in late September.

The next Nerine Day at Exbury is scheduled for 18th October. The meeting starts at 10.30 for 11.00 and our Members have their usual invitation to the event.

Autumn Meeting 2014

Our next meeting will be held on Sunday, 12th October at our normal venue, the Badger Farm Community Centre near Winchester. As in previous meetings, the doors will open at 10.00, with our speaker taking the stage at 11.00. The meeting will close at 16.00.

The speaker for the morning session will be Dr John David, Chief Scientist of the Royal Horticultural Society. He will talk about why DNA is so important these days in the classification and naming of organisms and how the DNA challenges us to re-think what are reliable characters for differentiation of species and genera and look for new features. I believe that we will find this a particularly valuable discussion with so much change going on around us.

As in all meetings, there will be a display table for any plants that you care to bring along to show Members. We hope to organise one of our informal discussions periods during the afternoon, so that Members can show their plants and answer any questions other might have. If any of you have slides or jpeg's of plants that you would like to show, please bring them along.

There will also be a sales table where you can offer material for sale on an 80:20 Member to Group basis. Please include double labels on pots, showing the price so that we can settle up easily at the end of the day.

There will be a lunch break from 12.30 until 14.00. For those of you that have not come before, it's worth adding that many Members bring their own food so that they can have the opportunity to chat to others. Alternatively, the Sainsbury's supermarket is based on the same site.

As usual, the charge for the meeting will be £3.00 each, payable at the door.

Directions to the meeting hall

Meetings are held at the Badger Hall Community Centre, near Winchester and, for those of you using satnav's or Google Earth, the post code is SO22 4QB.

By road, leave the M3 at junction 11 and proceed towards Winchester. At the first roundabout follow the sign to Winchester. At the second roundabout take the second exit up the hill towards Badger Farm. At the third roundabout take the third exit to the superstore (not the second exit marked Badger

Farm). Follow the road right round the edge of the car park until you see the doctor's surgery. Next to it is the Community Centre.

There is plenty of room in the car park and it is free: However, this privilege depends on Members filling in the form at the entrance giving the car's registration details.

Spring Meeting, 2015

Our spring meeting will be held at Badger Farm on Sunday, 29th March 2015.

I had hoped that our main speaker would be Jonathan Hutchinson, but family duties have made that impossible, so I am in the process of seeking an alternative. I know that, in part, this will be provided by Bill Squire who is currently on his annual pilgrimage to South Africa. If anyone else is keen to volunteer please let me know.

A *Moraea* Identified

Jeremy Spong

Some years ago (2007 to be precise) I received some seed from the AGS Seed Distribution labelled *Moraea ciliata*. Germination was good, but the growth was rather weak. On repotting the following year, there turned out to be two completely different types of corm, one symmetrical with a rough white skin, the other asymmetric and glossy pale brown. The latter was obviously not a *Moraea*, and I think it is probably a *Romulea* which I have acquired more than once under various names, and has presumably become confused with other bulbs in cultivation. The symmetrical corms were grown on separately, and slowly increased in size until at last, this year, they flowered. (Incidentally, I have found *Moraea* generally difficult to flower, or to get to flowering size, and it would be interesting to hear of other members' experiences, and perhaps to get some suggestions as to what I might be doing wrong!)



I had been puzzled by the name *ciliata* as the leaves were not in the least hairy, and the flowers confirmed that although they were a species of *Moraea* (or something closely related) the plants were definitely not *ciliata*. I was also initially disappointed, having waited so long for them to flower, to find that the flowers lasted less than a day. In fact, the first ones opened and closed while I was out for the day, so I missed them completely. However, over subsequent weeks, this was more than made up for by the frequent flushes of flower. In fact, I nicknamed the plant the 'firework moraea', because it reminded me of those fireworks where a succession of starbursts come one after the other, separated by slight pauses. The flowers, as well as being very pretty, had a remarkable scent, of peppermint - something I have rarely if ever encountered in a flower, although it is familiar enough from the leaves of various plants.

After some time spent poring over the keys in 'The Colour Encyclopedia of Cape Bulbs', I concluded that what I had was *Moraea setifolia*, formerly included in the genus *Gynandriris*. A search of the Pacific Bulb Society site online confirmed that the pattern of flowering matched this species, with each flower stem producing a succession of blooms, with a gap of a day or two between each, and most of the stems opening one or two flowers on the same days, so that the overall effect was quite spectacular. In the end, flowering lasted from 7th April until 11th May, with up to 19 flowers open on any one day, and one or more flowers open on a total of 14 days. So although the individual flowers were very short-lived, not opening until about 13.30, and wilting by about 17.30, the overall display makes it a plant well worth growing. A good quantity of seed has been set, and will be included in the bulb and seed distribution later this year.

Boophone disticha

About 12, maybe nearer 15 years ago, Bill Squire came here to visit me and very kindly gave me a couple of *Boophone disticha* bulbs. One of them flowered about 4 years ago, and produced a couple of seeds which are now quite decent sized bulbs. The same bulb flowered for a second time this year and I sent a couple of photos to Bill who suggested I forwarded some notes on my cultivation methods for the newsletter.

The bulb is in a clay pot, growing in my standard mix of equal parts of sterilised loam, high grade coarse peat and grit sand (mostly crushed grit). There is controlled release fertiliser added to the compost and the plant is fed when in growth - either a balanced feed or one

Mike Jeans



with a majority of potash: I always use fertiliser with trace elements included for all pot plants. It is on a bench in full light, and the minimum temperature in that part of the glasshouse is 5° C. When the plant is in growth, I am fairly generous with water, and withhold it when the bulb is dormant.

The seed head eventually reached about 18" in diameter and again produced just 2 seeds !!!



Wanted Column

I have not received any particular requests for this newsletter which is, perhaps, not surprising in view of our annual exchange.

Composts and perched water tables

Rodney Sims

At our meeting in March, Paul Cumbleton presented us a superb talk, with practical demonstrations, about composts. Boring you might say. No way! It was utterly fascinating. Those of you who did not manage to get to this meeting missed a real treat.

Do you know what a perched water table is? Or that unless you have more than 50% drainage material in our compost it will not drain properly? Or that some plants are fussy about the concentration of salts in their composts or supplied water?

It was this latter fact that rang bells with me. How would I know what the concentration of salts was when watering my precious plants. Paul showed us an instrument capable of measuring the concentrations of total dissolved salts using conductance (how much electricity it can pass). Where to obtain such a must- have instrument? I saw a trade name on his slides.

By chance I had been in touch with the company in one of my other lives. Hanna Instruments Ltd have their warehouse quite close to me and they make many variants of useful measuring instruments. The one Paul uses is their Primo meter. It comes with instructions and a calibrating solution for a tad under £40.

You can find out more on their website, www.hannainst.co.uk

Address : Eden Way,Pages Industrial Park, Leighton Buzzard, Beds. LU7 4AD

There is one other thing: where can I find out what my plants want? I will ask Paul at our next meeting October 12th in Winchester. See you there!”?

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