

The South African Bulb Group

Newsletter No. 19 -- July, 2011



From the Editor

David Victor

In the last newsletter we announced that the Autumn meeting had been arranged for 16th October. However, we subsequently found that the Nerine and Amaryllid Society meeting had their Autumn meeting and Nerine day scheduled for that day and, as we have many Members in common, we decided we should delay our meeting for a week, until 23rd October. So, please accept our apologies for any inconvenience this change may cause you and mark the new date in your diary.

The 3rd IBSA International Symposium is now fast approaching, with its start date being 28th August, the venue being the Goudini Spa, near Worcester in South Africa. If there are any of you out there that would still like to attend, you need to get your booking in to Rachel Saunders in the near future.

I'm very pleased to be able to tell you that, following our earlier appeals, loan projectors have been offered to us by Paul Cumbleton, Terry Smale and Alice van den Bon.

I'm always on the look-out for speakers for our future meetings. One that I was recently pleased to secure, in principle, is Jon Evans, who I am sure that you will all know is a photographer of outstanding skill. At a future meeting, he will address us on that subject with particular reference to South African bulbs. However, I am always looking for more potential speakers and welcome all suggestions and volunteers.

I am always keen to get material from Members for this newsletter. This can be articles, notes about particular, favourite plants, details of nurseries and seedsmen that have provided material to you, letters, questions, comments; just anything that you care to write about! Remember that anything that interests you is likely to interest other Members. You can contact me by email at davidxvictor@btinternet.com or write to me at:

Chapel Leigh Farm House, Chapel Leigh, Taunton, Somerset, TA4 3RB

Autumn Meeting 2011

As mentioned above, the 2011 Autumn meeting will be held on 23rd 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 speakers taking the stage at 11.00. The meeting will close at 16.00.

The subject for the meeting will be the 3rd IBSA Symposium which will be held in South Africa in late August this year. The speakers at our meeting will be two of those that are giving presentations at the Symposium: Bill Squire, our Chairman, and me. Bill will give a resume of his talk, entitled "Growing South African Bulbs in Southern England" and I will give a resume of mine, which is entitled "Xerophytic and Tuberous Pelargonium". We will, of course, also report on the other talks given during the event.

Bill and I are also going on for an extended stay in South Africa after the event, working our way northward via Middlepos, Nieuwoudtville and Kamieskroon to Springbok and then, probably going back southward to Clanwilliam. So, hopefully, we will also have a large stash of photographs to show you covering our wanderings through the Cape.

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 others 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 a 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 Farm 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, 2012

We are currently in the process of trying to settle on a date for the Spring meeting. In doing so, we are aiming to avoid conflicts with other meetings, particularly of the Frit Group and the Nerine & Amaryllid Society, both of which have several Members in common with us. It will take until the early Autumn to finally tie this up, so final details will be circulated around then.

Our aim is to hold our meeting on either Sunday 18th or 25th March. However, in an attempt to secure our position, we have tentatively booked all four Sundays in March with Badger Hall Farm, though we may have to give up one or more of those before too long.

Assuming that we manage to sort this out in a satisfactory manner, our speaker then will be Bob Charman and his talk will be entitled "Lake Van, Hakkari, Yuksekova and beyond". Most of you will know Bob from his attendance at our meetings, if not from elsewhere, so I don't believe that I need to tell you more of his expertise and knowledge in our field.

2011 Seed and bulb distribution

Bill Squire

Promises of material for the seed and bulb distribution need to be received by me by the 17th August. Ideally the material also needs to be received by this date as I will be leaving for the IBSA Symposium in South Africa on 25 August: all material must be in my hands before 25th August.

Having received the information Alice and I will prepare the list and Alice will circulate it prior to her own departure for South Africa on 1st September.

Members who do not receive the list by email should send a SAE to me before 17th August, to ensure that I can send out the list to them before my departure.

Distribution of plant material will be made in the week commencing 26 September after I return from SA. Alina has offered to assist me if necessary.

My address is:

8 Benmoor Road, Creekmoor, Poole, Dorset, BH17 7DS

Hardy *Nerine* trial

**Bob Brown
via Andrew Eames**

It has been agreed that there will be a trial of hardy cultivars and hybrids of *Nerine bowdenii* and *Nerine undulate* at Wisley (probably in the Portsmouth Field). The trial will be run over three years with the purpose of reviewing those that already have the RHS Award of Garden Merit (AGM) and assess whether any others should receive the AGM. A further aim is to check the consistency and accuracy of the naming of plants submitted for trial, which will be reflected in the final report produced at the end of the trial.

Although the formal trial will not begin until 2014, it will be established over two years to get the plants up to the same standard prior to assessment. Anyone interested in sending in plants for the trial should do so from March next year (2012) and each entry should be either 5 bulbs or a growing plant with five or more bulbs. Additional information as to the history and origin of the bulbs (if available) would be most welcome.

Please contact the Trials Office at RHS Garden Wisley for further information if you would like to take part in the trial.

An experiment in compost re-cycling

Audrey Cain

Now that my bulb potting compost contains a fairly large amount of very expensive Seramis, I decided to experiment with re-cycling instead of discarding it after use. To this end I acquired a 40 litre electric steriliser from Two Wests and Elliott.

After a couple of trials, I had to construct a sort of wooden platform on which to stand the steriliser outside the garage door, in order to collect the hot soil on a clean surface. (It burnt holes in the plastic tarpaulin!) Further preparations include choosing a cool dry day, and arranging an appointment with my Chiropractor- just in case! This project is very labour-intensive – in fact it is jolly hard work! Is it worth it? Time will tell.....

As the bulbs are un-potted, the compost is sifted through a 6mm sieve to remove some of the old roots and missed bulbs. It is stored in bins until there is enough for a couple of loads. (80litres)

Before loading the steriliser, the soil is moistened so that it clings together when squeezed in the hand. (It saves time and effort to have a batch ready for sterilising at

the end of a previous session!) I use a small electric cement mixer throughout the whole operation.

The steriliser takes about an hour to raise the temperature of the soil to 80 degrees C, after which it is switched off and left until it reaches 90 degrees. The soil is then removed by pulling out the base plate, and gradually spreading it from the wooden platform on to a tarpaulin to cool. Hopefully pathogens, weed seeds and missed bulbils will have been killed.

The next stage (while the second batch is heating) is to return the cooled soil to the cleaned cement mixer for the addition of about 10 % of fresh high humus material, (peat or bulb booster) and about 160/200 grams of Vitax Q4 powder. The compost is then ready for use, though the advice from Thermoforce is to allow it to aerate for a week to remove any build up of ammonia which may have developed during heating.

This is the 3rd year of this project. For the past 2 years I have used Westland Feed-all, a slow release granular fertilizer – (release controlled by temperature, according to the label), which may not have been ideal, judging by the rather disappointing results. I haven't yet decided whether the soil or weather is responsible, though for the past 3 years weather has also been less than ideal for winter rainfall bulbs. After last winter's low temperatures, I have also re-introduced minimal heat to the greenhouse, having gone without for several years, but I think the main problem has been a sudden excessive rise in temperature too early in spring. Many species in my collection aborted their flowers and started to go dormant.

I am hoping for better results this coming season, and that the inclusion of Vitax will make a difference, but it is still too early to draw any conclusions.

My favourite genus – *Lachenalia*

Bill Squire

As some members are aware I have a very keen interest in the Genus *Lachenalia* of which there are about 120 recognised species and subspecies. Their habitat covers most of the Cape, West Coast and Northern Cape with several crossing over into the Eastern Cape.

I have about 90 species and sub-species of flowering size with 10 other species at the seedling stage, all are grown in 5inch plastic pots of which I have just over 300 pots. I use a very simple soil mix made up of equal parts by volume of JI No3 and a 5mm sharp grit plus a slack handful of bonemeal as a slow release fertilizer, no other fertilizer is used at any stage of growth.

Flowering usually starts for me in November, with the last of the late flowering plants finishing in May: the first two that bloom are *L. rubida* and *L. bulbifera* and the final two are usually *L. nervosa* and *salteri*.

Most are easy from seed and will flower in the third or forth year with the exception of *L. campanulata* which I find will flower in its second year. If seed doesn't

germinate by the end of the second year, I believe it will not germinate, so the soil is disposed of to make room for fresh seed. I spray with insecticide twice a year, first at the beginning of the growing season and again in mid Spring this controls greenfly and blackfly. I have never found mealy bug on *Lachenalia* (touching wood as I write this!), though it does seem to enjoy living on *Nerine* in my experience.

A couple of points of interest about *Lachenalia*:

Graham Duncan in his book “The *Lachenalia* Handbook” states that *L. bulbifera* with its plentiful different forms spread over a large area starts its flowering season in late April and finishes in September in South Africa; *L. sargeantii* is known to be stimulated into flowering only by fire. It had not been seen for 33 years until Rhoda and Cameron McMasters visited an area near their home in Caledon after a fire some years ago and rediscovered a large population of them. The following day it was confirmed by Graham Duncan as the long lost *L. sargeantii*.

Do I have a favourite? Yes, it goes back to 2001 which is the first time I travelled in South Africa alone. On a whim I drove up the mountain behind the town of Piketberg and on one stretch of road I came across a large burnt area. Having climbed down the embankment, I came across a plant of *L. aloides* which did not fit any description of *L. aloides* sub-species that I could find. I was lucky to find one of the plants had gone over earlier than most and collected some seed. Clutching my seed in my hand, I made my way back to the car though the shrub remains and it was not until I climbed back up the embankment to the road that I found that my once light blue jeans had turned black as I pushed my way the blackened remains of the shrubs. The resulting bulbs are now in my collection as *L. aloides* var. *piketberg*.

I’m attaching photo’s of some of my other favourites and I am always happy to show members around my collection (I have other genera besides *Lachenalia*) after a prior phone call to arrange a mutual time.



L. mutabilis



L. aloides var. *luteola*



L. convallaroides



L. latimerae



L. kliprandensis

Cyrtanthus mackenii var. *cooperi*

David Victor

I have grown this sub-species for a number of years and have always regarded it as one of my favourite of the genus. I particularly like it for the fact that it flowers every year, even if I totally neglect it – something that I have been prone to do in recent years!

A couple of years ago, I was very lucky to be able to travel through the Eastern Cape with Cameron McMaster and one night after dinner we got to talking about the genus and, eventually, about this particular plant. It was that at this stage I started to have some concerns about the plants that I grew under this name.

My plant has butter-yellow, tubular flowers and I have seen similar plants with the same name in other collections. So, recently, I sent a photograph of the plant (see below) to Cameron and asked his view on it. His reply was as follows:

I believe the *Cyrtanthus* in your picture is *C. mackenii* subsp. *mackenii* which is the shade loving evergreen sub-species. Subsp. *cooperi* grows in full sun in damp spots in open grassland, goes dormant in mid summer and flowers in late winter/early spring before the leaves appear.

Here is Dee's (Snijman) description (in brief)

C. mackenii Hook.f. The Ifafa lily

Perennial geophyte, 180–530 mm high. **Leaves** green or dry at flowering, narrowly lanceolate, 7–18 mm wide, slightly channelled. **Flowers** 3–8(–9), spreading, perianth tubular, dilated slightly to throat, 35–55 mm long, white to yellow, often tinged apricot pink, spicy- to sweet-scented, stamens included in throat, stigma 3-branched. **Flowering time** June–Nov. Shaded stream banks (subsp. *mackenii*) and seasonally wet grassland (subsp. *cooperi*); Dry Highveld Grassland, Indian Ocean Coastal Belt (Near Matatiele through S coast KZN to near East London).

Here is a paragraph from an article I wrote which is more descriptive:

A further species of the open grassland is *C. mackenii* subsp. *cooperi* which occurs southwards from Stutterheim. It is the earliest of the genus to flower in this area with sparse dull yellow to pinkish flowers. Although widespread it favours marshy ground where large populations are concentrated, making an impressive sight in early August. This species is referred to as *C. ochroleucus* in the book by Batten & Bokelmann “Flowering Plants of the Eastern Cape”. *C. ochroleucus* is however the name of a species from the West Cape which it resembles, but which does not occur here (Dyer, 1939). Both in habitat and growth pattern, it is very different to *C. mackenii* subsp. *mackenii* which is evergreen and has many shiny dark green leaves with bright yellow flowers and occurs along the banks of streams in full shade in patches of frost-free coastal forest. *C. mackenii* subsp. *mackenii* never occurs in open grassland and multiplies prolifically by offsets forming large clumps at the edges of pools. In contrast, *C. mackenii* subsp. *cooperi* never has offsets (it has single bulbs), is fully deciduous and has only one or two grey-green leaves. The distribution of the two species does not overlap.

I set out below the photo of my plant that I sent to Cameron and a photo he returned showing the true *C. mackenii* var. *cooperi* in habitat. So, now I’m off to correct some labels!

However, before doing so, I’ll note one other issue. The extract of Dee Snijman’s article on *Cyrtanthus mackenii* given above, is from *Bothalia* 37: 5 (2007), which raises the two varieties to sub-species status. This has not been accepted by Raphael Govaerts in Kew’s World Checklist of Monocot’s database, where he considers the sub-species to be a synonym. So, I’m afraid that, for the moment at least, you will have to decide for yourself which you accept. Good luck!



My plant of *C. mackenii* var. *mackenii*



C. mackenzii var. *cooperi* in habitat
(Cameron McMaster)

***Ammocharis coranica* -- an update**

Bill Squire

Members may recall that last year I reported that my *Ammocharis coranica* flowered after I had watered it by mistake after it had died back. Well this year I deliberately watered it again in June and it is flowering again at this moment (mid July). So I would suggest to anybody with this plant who is unable to flower it give it another watering now and you may get a very pleasant surprise.