

The Southern African Bulb Group

Newsletter No. 27 -- February, 2014



From the Editor

David Victor

Well, here we are into another year. I imagine that most of us have suffered the same outrageous opening to the year, with storm after storm. I live quite near to the Somerset Levels and have seen the devastation that it has caused so many people. Luckily, I live on a hill but, even here the road has turned into a river more than once. Let's hope that it is all at an end and we can start the process of drying out and once again looking forward.

Exbury have their Lachenalia display on the 15th March this year. The meeting starts at 10.30 for 11.00 and we have our usual invitation to the event. Their Nerine day is scheduled for 18th October at Exbury also.

Spring Meeting 2014

The next meeting will be held on Sunday, 23rd March 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 Paul Cumbleton and his subject for the meeting will be compost mixes and pot drainage. I am very pleased to say that he will be giving not only advice, but also demonstrations.

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.

Autumn meeting on 12th October.

I am pleased to be able to tell you that our speaker at the autumn meeting will be Dr John David, Chief Scientist at 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 indicated above, the meeting will take place on Sunday, 12th October, all other details as normal.

Wanted Column

Our Secretary, Alina Hughes, is looking for a source for *Scadoxus cinnabarinus* and *S. pseudocaulus*, either as seed or plants. If you can help, please contact her at: abmhughes@gmail.com

Cliff Hirst is looking for some *Nerine* bulbs to expand his collection of *N. sarniensis* hybrids. In particular, he is looking for some species: *N. laticoma*, *N. gibsoni* and *N.*

rehmannii. He would also be happy to accept any bulbs other than the ones he mentioned. He would be happy to pay the postage for any material he is offered. If you can help, please contact him at: cliffhirst@hotmail.co.uk.

In passing he mentions that he has used the bulb exchange for the past year and says how well organised it is. So, many thanks to Bill and Alice.

A mystery bulb

Bill Squire

In 2011, David Victor and I did a trip to the Western Cape, part of which was a stop at the Vrede-Oord orange farm just to the East of Clanwilliam. We did a little plant-hunting along the road that fronts the farm and, on a low rock-face we discovered a small plant that appeared to be some form of bulb, in seed. We collected a few and everyone seemed to germinate! In the second year they produced small bulbs and this year mine have flowered.

The bulbs are now about 2 mm in diameter and the flowers (see picture) are 10-12 mm in diameter. The question is: what on earth are they? Neither David nor I have any ideas. Do any of you? If so, please let one of us know. Our thanks in advance!



Growing Amaryllids from seed

From Jon Evans

I have always struggled to grow from seed the fleshy Amaryllids whose seeds start to grow immediately (I've forgotten the botanical term). This may seem ludicrous to the

more experienced members, but I seldom get more than one or two seedlings through their first year. I have come to the conclusion that this is because the pots get overlooked at some point, and dry out.

So this year, I have sown the seeds as usual, pressed into sharp sand on the top of the seed pot, but have kept the pots in a seed tray without holes, under a propagation hood, standing in 1 cm of water. The whole tray can then sit on a sunny south facing windowsill (in our bathroom). When the sun is hot, the hood steams up preventing scorching and the condensation drips onto the sand keeping the seedlings moist. I now have healthy pots of several species of *Brunsvigia*, *Haemanthus*, *Strumaria* and *Nerine*. As far as I can see, the seedlings can stay under the hood for the whole of their first growing season. I took some out, watered them and put them on a north facing windowsill where they won't scorch, and they have been fine except for one pot of *Brunsvigia* seedlings which got too dry over Christmas when I wasn't here. This approach also prevents predation by molluscs. Whether by luck or not, I haven't so far had any problems with damping off, probably because of the warm environment (touch wood).

The same approach seems to work for the Amaryllids with papery seeds, which I also press into sand, so they get plenty of light.

I'm not recommending this for everyone - I am sure there are many members who care for their plants more assiduously don't need such arrangements. But for busy members, whose plants sometimes get overlooked for a crucial few days, this may improve success with these special plants.

Pests - 1

Bill Squire

In the past I have had problems with slugs, snails, greenfly, cats, vine weevil and red lily beetle, but the latest pest is a first for me: that is mice. I know of two friends who have had trouble with mice eating *Massonia* leaves, but my problem is different.

All my hardy bulbs are grown in clay pots and plunged into a sand bed. On entering the greenhouse one morning, I found several of my pots buried under a pile of sand, which had me puzzled for a while until I noticed several small holes alongside one of the pots. On lifting the pot, I found a tunnel going through the sand and then realised a mouse or mice had moved in; all without my permission of course!



So it was off to the shop to buy poison. I bought Rentokil Mouse Killer. After feeding this to them for five or six days, they appeared to be thriving on it, with much more activity going on (perhaps I have created a super breed!!). Anyway, there is no evidence of them eating the bulbs so I decided that as the bait didn't work. We'll just have to put up with each other's company for now and for my part hope they will disappear when the better weather arrives, if ever.

Pests – 2

David Victor

A couple of years ago I had some spare space in my greenhouse and I decided to grow a couple of tender flowering shrubs in it. And, I should say that I enjoyed them very much.....for a while. What I didn't realise when I took this decision was the trouble they were likely to cause.

The main purpose of the greenhouse is to keep my National Collection of Xerophytic Pelargonium and that is where most of my effort goes. Passing through the greenhouse I would briefly admire my shrubs, but not spend much time taking a detailed look at them. That was a pity! Unknown to me, tortrix moth had come in with them. Please don't ask which species of Tortrix, as I read on Wikipedia that there are over 10,000 species of Tortrix. I noticed it in the end, when I noticed webbing and leaves curling on my *Clerodendron ugandense*.

Ah, well that shouldn't be too much of a problem, should it? That number of species suggests that they are very specific in their habits. But that appears not to be the case. I then read a piece by Dove Associates which said that one species, the Carnation Tortrix Moth, is not too choosy. It is a pest on some 25 different genera, including *Pelargonium*.

It was just about at that point that I started to notice some leaves curling on one or two of my *Pelargonium*, as they started into leaf. I then did two things. Firstly, out went

the shrubs. Secondly, I started to look for a control. Well, chemicals are pretty much out of the question – “not available to the amateur” – I’m going to vote UKIP after that! There is a biological control and there are pheromone traps, but I haven’t tried either yet.

For the moment, I have been concentrating on eternal vigilance – which means every day searches through the collection. As that’s something over 600 plants, it takes a while! Luckily, there is a good signal – the rolled over leaf.

However, I found to my horror that they sometimes have another trick up their sleeves. A large proportion of the collection is made up of plants from section *Hoarea*, which is a truly geophytic group; they all have surface level tubers, without above ground stems. As you will see from the photo, they will attack the tuber directly and totally consume it, rather than leaves.

I don’t think that I need to draw a moral from this story!



Bill’s travelogue **Being a description of his 2012 trek in the Cape - continued**

Monday, 3rd September

Moved on from Clanwilliam - destination Nieuwoudville. I used the dirt track road to Klaver then across to Vredendal, coming back to Vanrhynsdorp before heading up the plateau to Nieuwoudville. I saw many plants along the way some of which I had seen before. On the Klaver road I came across a large patch of *Lapeirousia*

jacquinii and mingled with them were a pure white form in equal numbers. *Ornithogalum suaveolens* was in several locations along that track as well (it has recently been given a name change to *Albuca suaveolens*). *Sparaxis variegata* I saw and greatly admired; it's similar to *Sparaxis villosa* but has much stronger colours and size. Just couldn't go the day without finding another *Lachenalia* this time *L. martinae*. Easily recognised by its single heavily marked clasping leaf, well pleased to have seen that. *Albuca maxima* was also seen growing along a lot of the grass verges.

Tuesday, 4th September

First a visit to the town's Nature Reserve and the first thing I saw was a large patch of pinky-red which turned out to be *Hesperantha cucullata*, all with their buds tightly closed just waiting for the 3 o'clock bell. I went back in the afternoon to take photos.

Hesperantha pauciflora also opened at about the same time.

Among others I saw *Babiana vanzylliae*, yellow in large colonies, yellow *Romulea diversiformis*, *Androcymbium pulchrum*, the red form of *Bulbinella latifolia* var. *doleritica*, the spectacular *Lapeirousia oreogena* and a nice form of *Lachenalia violacea*. There were many other plants flowering including several species of daisies.

Moved on to other sites outside the reserve but saw much the same plants as earlier except for *Lachenalia alba*.

Wednesday, 5th September

Today went to the glacial pavement about 8 kms outside of the town, on the way I saw *Bulbinella eburniflora*, a creamy white plant, another first for me. Moved on another 10 kms or so to the farm Matjiesfontein where for a small fee you can drive around the farm and see the flowers, field after field of daisies, orange, yellow, pink and blue, but if you take the time to stop and get out of the car there are all sorts of treasures to see (I get strange looks from the locals because all they can see is daisies). I saw a lovely form of *Lachenalia elegans*, with one heart shaped leaf. Several *Romulea* sp. and *Lachenalia*'s of course.

Thursday, 6th September

I travelled to Loeriesfontein which is about 60 kms from here, stopping on the way there and back and saw lots of plants I had already seen. I also came across a large patch of pink daisies this time, quite stunning! Also seen were *Lachenalia congesta*, gone over and setting seed, but still very recognisable, whether in flower or not, by its two ovate leaves, very short stem and dense flowers clustered near the top. (I think I put a pot of these on the monthly show table earlier this year). I also stumbled across a colony of *Hesperantha vaginata* which were open in the afternoon, with very striking yellow with dark brown markings.

Friday, 7th September

On the move again this time to Middelpoos with a two hour stopover at Calvinia, but not a lot to see; most of the plants had gone over except for several species of *Androcymbium*. *A. crispum* and *A. volutare* both have recently been lumped into the genus *Colchicum*: the mind boggles! Middelpoos is about 80 kms from Calvinia in the North and Sutherland to the South. Translated the name means "middle post" and is the distance a rider on horseback could expect to travel in a day. On arrival I met up with other members of IBSA as planned.

Saturday, 8th September

It was a brilliant day today, wall to wall sunshine and so much seen: both the red and yellow forms of *Daubenyia* were in full flower with a couple of orange one's for good measure and *D.marginata*. Four species of *Romulea*, *R. unifolia*, *R. komsbergensis*, *R. subulosa* and *R.monadelphica*. Several species of *Moraea*, lots of different coloured Daisies and other annuals and, to finish the day, I saw a very large black and white eagle at close quarters. I was told they are rare and not often seen and are hated by the local farmers because they will kill lambs at any opportunity.

Sunday, 9th September

Today was just a day of travel some over the worst gravel roads I have used in South Africa, five hours in all and much too cold to look for flowers.

Monday, 10th September

Just a wind down day, getting the car washed to rid it of a few pounds of mud and dust inside and out, rearranging my kit so it all fits in my case and generally taking it easy before driving to the airport tomorrow and back to reality.

END OF THE FINAL LESSON!

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