



Southern African Bulb Group

www.sabg.tk

SABG Newsletter no. 35 July 2017

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News

- ★ The SABG will be running its Annual Bulb and Seed Exchange again this summer. See the Notices section on the next page.
- ★ The SABG web-site is now hosted on a secure reliable environmentally-friendly web-hosting company's servers. See the Notices later in this Newsletter.

Dates for your diary

- ★ Sunday 8th October 2017: SABG Autumn Meeting, Winchester
- ★ Saturday 14th October 2017: NAAS Nerine Visit Day, Exbury Gardens.
- ★ Sunday 8th April 2018: SABG Spring Meeting, Winchester
- ★ Sunday 7th October 2018: SABG Autumn Meeting, Winchester

From the Editor

Stupidly, I predicted that this Newsletter would appear in May, later changed to June. When will I ever learn?

The BBC television programme "Gardeners' World" has a piece each week on "Jobs for the Weekend". I don't need to watch this, because I can always tell when my conservatory needs tidying, because of the appearance of some little messengers. See the "Bulbils" section later in this Newsletter.

At our last meeting I didn't buy a single plant or bulb (shame!) This self-restraint was because I am consciously trying to reorganise my conservatory for easier cultivation. I say "consciously" because so far this activity has been at least as much in the mind as physically. At least most of our plants are now dormant and their apparently empty pots are more easily shuffled around, or stood temporarily in the garden. I hope your plants are better organised than mine are!

Notices and Requests

SABG Bulb and Seed Exchange 2017

The Southern African Bulb Group will be running its Annual Bulb and Seed Exchange again this year. Our Vice-chairman Jon Evans, who recently joined our Committee, has also volunteered to take on the onerous task of running this eagerly awaited activity this year. Bill Squire has run this very successfully for many years, and it is time he took a well-earned rest!

Jon provided the following instructions. Please take careful note of them, especially the deadlines!

As I will be taking over running the Exchange from Bill, please be patient with any changes, errors or irregularities. We are hoping to run the exchange a little earlier in the season, so material is sent out in early September, and can be planted and started into growth in a timely fashion.

Thanks to Bill's hard work, this Exchange has developed into a most successful and anticipated part of our activities, so we are hoping for at least as many of you as before, if not more, to provide your spare bulb or seed material for the benefit of other members! Please note that although we call it an exchange, if you don't yourself have material to offer, you will still be able to request seeds or bulbs from the list in exchange for a suitable monetary donation to cover at least postage and packing and a little bit extra for the SABG funds.

We will probably only be able to accept material from and send material to members in the U.K. and the European Union, because of import/export complications in dealing with other countries.

The timetable this year is as follows:

16th August

- ★ If you have bulbs or seeds available, please post them to me, Jon Evans (address below), to *arrive* by Wednesday 16th August. Please include a list of their names, with any supporting information such as source, place of origin or variety name.
- ★ If you expect to have them available later, by the end of August, please send me a list of the names of your intended donations, with any supporting information, by email (address below) or post, to arrive by Wednesday 16th August. (Please send any such donations, matching the list you sent earlier, to me by 31st August at the latest.)

20th August

- ★ I will then prepare the Bulb and Seed Exchange list of available material which I will email out to Members by 20th August. Should you require a list to be sent to you by post, please send me a self-addressed envelope suitable for two or three folded sheets of A4 paper (with the correct postage attached if you live in the UK).

31st August

- ★ Please send any previously notified donations to me by 31st August at the latest.
- ★ After you have received the Bulb and Seed Exchange list of available material, please send your wishlist to me by email or post (with a cheque or postal order if you did not donate bulbs or seeds), to arrive by 31st August. I will then start the despatch process.
- ★ Then it's up to you to grow the plants and enjoy them!

I hope you find this exercise interesting and perhaps obtain some new plants. Of course, its success depends on the generous efforts of the donors, so please check whether you have some spares you can donate.

Jon Evans

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Membership list

Again, this is still a "work in progress". But as a result of recent "bounced" emails (about the forthcoming Seed and Bulb Exchange, from Jon Evans), Jon and Alina have endeavoured to write to members whose email appeared to have stopped working. As a result we have been able to update some of the email addresses in the membership list.

As a result, a few of you will receive this Newsletter but may have not received one or more previous newsletters. You can fill in any gaps by visiting our Newsletters page on the SABG web-site¹, where you will be able to browse or download any that you might have missed.

¹ <http://www.sabg.tk/newsletter/>

SABG web site

We've changed our web host. A web host is a computer or set of computer servers that stores the pages of a web-site, and is permanently connected to the Internet through a reasonably fast and reliable connection, so that many people can read the web pages on their own computers, tablets and mobile phones.

I set up the SABG web-site in October 2006, and for the last ten years or so it has been hosted on a computer in the School of Computer Science and Informatics² at Cardiff University, where I used to work on computing and databases for biodiversity studies and species catalogues. I am very grateful to Dr Andrew Jones for making this machine available at no cost to the SABG, and giving it a poke every now and again when it fell asleep.

However, it is now time for our web-site to be put on a more secure long-term footing. It is now being hosted in the UK by Kualo Ltd.³ who say they provide "fast, secure & rock-solid hosting", a claim backed by a "99.9% Uptime Guarantee" (fingers crossed!) and many positive reviews.

They also have strong environmental credentials: their servers are housed in an energy-efficient data-centre powered by energy from green renewable sources. It is surprising just how much energy is used by the Internet, including the World-Wide Web. Apparently the energy consumption and carbon dioxide output of the Internet now exceed those caused by air travel, and the number of computers, data stores and communications devices are expected to double by the year 2020. This information came from Kualo's web page⁴, which also has some hints at the bottom for how you can help reduce your energy use while browsing the Web.

While I'm going on about web pages, and there are some long web addresses in small print at the bottom of this page: not everyone knows that if you are reading this newsletter online, by opening it from the email to which it is attached, or by going to the list of newsletters on our web-site, you can just click on one of these links, as if you were looking at a web page. You don't have to type it out again (unless you are reading a paper copy, of course).

Another hint: if, for example, you happen to remember there was an article about something of interest in the SABG Newsletter, but you can't remember when, you

2 <http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/computer-science>

3 <https://www.kualo.co.uk/company>

4 <https://www.kualo.co.uk/blog/the-environmental-impact-of-the-internet>

don't have to read through all the editions to find it. I was in exactly this position when looking for an *Oxalis* article, as you'll read later on. Just go to Google and specify that you only want it to search the SABG web-site, not the entire World-Wide Web. You can do this by typing into the Google search bar "Oxalis site:sabg.tk" (without the double quote marks, and with no spaces on either side of the colon).

By the way, I'm planning to remove the Word and OpenOffice (ODT) versions of the SABG Newsletters from the web site, because the PDF versions are preferable – they work better onweb pages on mobiles and tablets as well as on ordinary computers and laptops, and the formatting is more likely to be preserved as intended. The Word and ODT document formats require the reader to have particular software installed, which may not remain available in future, and the formatting may be messed up. If you think this change may cause any problem, please let me know.

SABG meetings

Spring 2017 SABG meeting

Our last meeting was held on **Sunday 2nd April 2017** at the Badger Farm Community Centre near Winchester. There will be a report on this meeting in the next Newsletter.

The next SABG meeting

Our next meeting will be held on **Sunday 8th October 2017** 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 am, and the meeting will close at about 4 pm.

The speaker for the morning session at approximately 11 am will be our own member Jeremy Spon from Canterbury, who will talk about "*The Iridaceae of South Africa*".

As usual, there will be a display table for any plants that you bring along. We plan to have one of our informal discussion periods 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 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 12.30 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 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 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.

SABG Spring 2018 meeting

The Spring meeting will be on **Sunday 8th April 2018**, also at the Badger Farm Community Centre. Details of the speaker will follow in due course.

On the Hantamsberg

The Hantamsberg lies 47 km north of Calvinia, in the Northern Cape of South Africa. It has a fairly dry climate, being subjected to most rain in the winter months and can often be carpeted by snow, after a winter storm. It is the most prominent of the flat-topped, steep-sided mountains scattered through the Roggeveld, rising 460 m above the western Karoo plain (summit 1312 m above sea-level). [photo below] The Hantam plateau consists of fine grained soils supporting patches of doleritic renosterveld. Many endemic species occur, especially geophytes.

We joined the IBSA group for the September, 2014, visit onto the Hantamsberg. Hopes were not high that we would find many interesting plants as there had been little rain in the previous weeks but, happily, the warmer weather had caused earlier flowering.



Our first foray was at a level, pebbly patch near the unlocked gate onto the mountain – just ‘to see what we could find’. Our leader suddenly stopped, sniffing excitedly, and pronounced that there was a *Gladiolus* nearby. [above] So, we all started to sniff the air hoping to find the flowers producing the wonderful



scent that was producing such excitement. There it was, the small cryptic *Gladiolus uysiae* camouflaged amongst the pebbly background.

20% of humans, evidently, do not possess the olfactory receptors needed to pick up the scent emitted by *Gladiolus* species. Unfortunately, I am one of them but I was pleased to see such a large population.



We found many plants, including several species with spiralled leaf forms including *Moraea tortilis* [above], *Gethyllis villosa* and *Bulbine torta*, the latter two being found, later, on the Bloukrans Pass. We also saw *Romulea diversiformis*, *R. atrandra* and *R. tetragona*. *Babiana praemorsa* [below] with abruptly truncate, wedge-shaped leaves was growing in crevices in the dolerite pavement. A large population of *Bulbinella nutans* was seen in the wet area, on the top.



Romulea hantamensis caused great excitement. This species is endemic to the Hantamsberg, growing where the ground is often wet in winter. Some plants were in clumps and others scattered singly across a wide area. It is specialised for pollination by nectar-feeding long-proboscid flies and is one of the few species producing an appreciable amount of nectar. We were in luck to find the flowers open, basking in the warmth of the sun. [below]



Much variation occurred in this population. [below] Characteristically the flowers are pinky mauve with dark spots and arrow-shaped blotches near the tips of the tepals, or pale pink with no markings. Some may be pure white. The tepals were pointed or rounded.



We enjoyed the whole excursion and a good day was had by all.

Kath Baker

Bulbils

I used the word “Snippets” previously for this section, intending that it would remind readers of the ancient and venerable craft of scrap-book making, complete with scissors and glue-pot, which is probably threatened with extinction by the digital arts of cutting and pasteing, chatting and blogging (I won’t mention tweeting!)

But I think perhaps “bulbils” are more in keeping with our cultivations and aspirations for growing small bulbs into bigger ones. So please send me any observations, thoughts or ideas, however small, and hopefully by their inclusion here they might grow into something larger. However, not all bulbils are to be cherished ...

Unwelcome bulbils

I seem to have the National Collection of weedy *Oxalis*, but my identifications here are tentative. If anyone knows better, please let me know! *Oxalis corniculata* is, according to the RHS web-site, the small creeping one with green or purple-tinted leaves, yellow flowers and exploding seed-pods, which grows happily outdoors, especially in summer.



In the conservatory I also have what I think is *O. pes-caprae* (known in America as “Bermuda Buttercup”), the one with semi-succulent leaves and thick tap-roots which remind one that oca (the South American root vegetable, also known as “New Zealand yam”) is an *Oxalis* (*O. tuberosa*). It doesn’t seem to produce seed but somehow still seems to get around the greenhouse, presumably by means of its little bulbils. It particularly enjoys snuggling down amongst the dead leaf-bases of

Cymbidiums. Luckily it’s fairly easy to pull out, unlike *O. corniculata*, where the stem snaps off just below the point where the creeping branches appear, leaving a root to re-grow.



Lastly, there are of course a large number of desirable *Oxalis* species which are attractive, and interesting because they are not monocots like most other bulbs. There was an article about them by Diana Chapman in SABG Newsletter no. 7 in March 2007⁵, illustrated with three forms of *O. obtusa*, and a more technical article in Newsletter no. 20 in November 2011⁶.



Oxalis obtusa ‘Peach’ [Diana Chapman]

5 <http://www.sabg.tk/newsletter/SABGnews7.pdf>

6 <http://www.sabg.tk/newsletter/SABGnews20.pdf>

Small Dusty Wave and Tortrix moths

Another warning that I've not been tidying my conservatory happens in June, when little grey moths appear and move into the house. Unlike clothes moths and house moths, where the wings are folded together in a "swept-back" fashion over the body, these visitors hold their wings out sideways and flat against the glass or wall on which they rest. I think they are the Small Dusty Wave (*Idaea seriata*), common in England and the lowlands of Wales and Scotland. It has two generations per year, at least in the South, the second being in August and September. The larvae (caterpillars) prefer withered leaves and other plant debris, so they are unlikely to be a pest in our collections, but they are indicative of a need for a clean-up!



Small Dusty Wave

Talking about small moths, David Victor reported having a problem with Tortrix moths. He said that they lay their eggs, in spring and autumn, on new leaves, growth points and buds. The caterpillars make a nest, by wrapping the plant material around themselves, then they eat it. There are about 400 species in the family Tortricidae⁷ in the UK alone. He said he has two, one of which he believes to be the Carnation tortrix, which attacks his Pelargoniums. One species has small green caterpillars that often fall off the plant, then lay still. The other falls, then hangs by a thread. They are a real nuisance and there are no insecticides that are effective. The RHS has an information page⁸, which appears to confirm David's two species.

7 <https://www.ukmoths.org.uk/thumbnails/tortricidae>

8 <https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?PID=860>

Not all moths are dingy and annoying. To redress the balance, have a look at UK Moths' page of the twenty moths which people notice and enquire about most often⁹.

In the next Newsletter

I plan to produce the next Newsletter (no. 36) for distribution during August 2017. It is planned to include the list of seed and bulb material donated to the Seed and Bulb Exchange an available for members to request in accordance with the rules of the exercise.

In the next few newsletters I'm hoping to include reports on the talks given at some previous meetings which have not yet been reported in the Newsletter, and where I have notes on them, in the hope that they will interest those of you who are not able to attend our meetings regularly.

What else the Newsletter contains depends on you! Ideas, notes, photos and or even articles for our newsletter are always welcome. You don't have to prepare them in any special way, and needn't spend ages refining them, I will happily edit them for the newsletter. Just send me an email (my address is at both ends of the Newsletter!)

SABG Committee

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9 <https://www.ukmoths.org.uk/top-20/>