



Southern African Bulb Group

www.sabg.tk

SABG Newsletter no. 38 October 2018

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Contents

News.....	1
Dates for your diary.....	1
From the Editor.....	1
Notices and Requests.....	1
<i>Memorial service for Rod and Rachel Saunders.....</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Special issue of The Bulb Garden.....</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>SABG web site.....</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Audrey Cain's BulbWeb.....</i>	<i>3</i>
SABG meetings.....	3
<i>Report on the Spring 2018 SABG meeting (continued).....</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>The next SABG meeting.....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>SABG Spring 2019 meeting.....</i>	<i>5</i>
Bulbils.....	6
<i>South Africa has moved.....</i>	<i>6</i>
In the next Newsletter.....	7
SABG Committee.....	7

News

- ★ The 2018 SABG Bulb and Seed Exchange has been completed. Many thanks to Jon Evans!
- ★ Some developments in the SABG web-site are reported below, including the partially completed re-instatement of Audrey Cain's BulbWeb.

Dates for your diary

- ★ Sunday 7th October 2018: SABG Autumn Meeting, Winchester
- ★ Saturday 13th October 2018: NAAS Nerine Visit Day, Exbury Gardens
- ★ Sunday 7th April 2019: SABG Spring Meeting, Winchester
- ★ Sunday 6th October 2019: SABG Autumn Meeting, Winchester

From the Editor

In this newsletter you can read about the memorial service for Rachel and Rod Saunders, attended by Ron and Kath Baker. I noticed that an obituary appeared in the BCSS "Cactus World" journal, and Audrey Cain and Bill Squire wrote two others, with different information, which appeared in the most recent issue of the NAAS "Amaryllids" journal.

Meanwhile, the Pacific Bulb Society has produced a special issue of its journal dedicated to the Saunders, as mentioned below.

Notices and Requests

Memorial service for Rod and Rachel Saunders

Members of the SABG may like to read of the Memorial Celebration that took place on August 2, at the Saunders' property near Stellenbosch.

Hundreds of relatives, friends, colleagues past and

present, from all corners of the globe, sat on chairs or blankets, under a large, old pine tree. As everyone gathered, three young musicians from the Stellenbosch Conservatoire played on cello, viola and violin. The sun shone, birds sang and butterflies fluttered past. Fiona conducted the memorial celebration, recalling Rachel's and Rod's lives, their tremendous botanical knowledge and willingness to share it, their love of mountaineering and music. Rod's beard caused much comment as did Rachel's organising skills. Fiona was ably assisted by Ondine who delivered a poem, about seed collecting, written by Rachel. When emotions began to show, a group of ladies sang quietly in the background. Many people came forward recalling experiences with Rod and Rachel. A young man sang ballads, accompanying himself on guitar. An older gentleman played the mouth organ. A moving soliloquy was given by "Blackie", Rod's affectionate name for her since he couldn't pronounce her actual name. She had worked for them since the early 1990's.

Next, we moved nearer the laboratory and greenhouses. An ex-colleague from Kirstenbosch recalled working with Rod. The congregation was asked to help plant three, two-metre-high trees to continue the avenue already started by Rachel and Rod. A young woman played the flute.

Finally, we had refreshments and continued reminiscing about a remarkable couple. It was a very moving afternoon.

Kath Baker

Kath mentioned in an email that she and Ron were in South Africa for a month and did a lot of plant hunting. Unfortunately, they were a bit early for most of the bulbs, as they expected because they wanted to celebrate their fiftieth wedding anniversary in early August in S.A. They met with Cameron McMaster and found some *Gladiolus* species in Napier. The best place for diversity was at the Trekpad accommodation at Willemsrivier near Nieuwoudtville. The *Romulea sabulosa* was fantastic, but the Nieuwoudtville Wild Flower Reserve was colourless. Overall, they found enough orange or yellow fields of daisies to keep them happy. The Kamiesberg was very colourful but Goegap Reserve was monochromatic purple. They didn't visit Namaqua National Park because, at the entrance, the official said there weren't enough flowers to warrant paying twice the entrance fee because they were foreigners. Last year, there was no entrance fee because of the few flowers. It was cold most of the time with snow on the mountain tops, and most guest houses were inadequately heated, but overall, they

enjoyed the time.

Special issue of The Bulb Garden

"The Bulb Garden", which is the journal of the Pacific Bulb Society, has devoted its Spring 2018 issue, volume 16 issue 2, to remembering Rod and Rachel Saunders. You can read the issue online¹. Many thanks to Aiko Talens, one of our members in the Netherlands, for drawing my attention to this.

It is a most inspiring collection of stories from friends, relatives and colleagues, together with details about their lives contributed by Ondine Schrick, who has worked for Silverhill Seeds for twenty years. She confirms that she will continue to run the business and nursery, although seed collection will be done mostly by others.

One story was taken from IBSA's journal, but there are many others as well. If you read them all, you will discover what a "*middelmannetjie*" is. There is also a notice about the *Gladiolus* book that Rachel and Rod were working towards, as follows.

"The R. Saunders Trust has been established and donations to it for publication of the species *Gladiolus* book the Saunders were nearly finished with will be accepted through Silverhill Seeds, but must be marked specifically for the book publication. Publication is not anticipated at least until 2019-20 since editing and layout have not begun. Please contact Ondine Schrick at www.silverhillseeds.co.za. Donations may be made to the R Saunders Trust to assist in publication of the *Gladiolus* book by using PayPal or credit card, but please contact Ondine first for instructions before making a donation."

SABG web site

If you have visited the SABG web site recently you may have noticed a change in style. The new version is intended to contain all the information from the original SABG web site², which will remain available for a while, but will not be updated. The URL (address) at which the web site can be found has not changed. It is www.sabg.tk or just sabg.tk. It is a secure web-site. If your web browser says it isn't and you have any concerns, use the full form of the URL which is <https://sabg.tk>.

1 <https://www.pacificbulbsociety.org/tbg/v16n2.pdf>

2 <https://sabg.tk/index.html>

I'm now using "wiki" software which will hopefully make it look smarter and more modern, make it easier to maintain and update, and in due course make it possible for members to contribute directly. A wiki appears to the user just like any other web site. However, behind the scenes there is software which makes it easier for the person maintaining the web site (at present that's me, and perhaps others in due course) to make additions and changes, keep a consistent style, and be more adaptable for use with smartphones, tablets and laptops as well as desktop computers. See Wikipedia's own explanation of what a wiki is³, and what it has to do with shuttle buses at Honolulu airport. The page "What's a wiki?" gives more details of how it works⁴. Please email me with any problems or suggestions.

Audrey Cain's BulbWeb

For many years Audrey Cain maintained a large collection of photographs of bulbs, many of them South African, which could be viewed on her web-site, called "BulbWeb". This has not been available for a while, but I am pleased to be able to report that, with help from Audrey and her son Doug, I have been able to reinstate the photos (about 1,500 in about 190 genera) and some of Audrey's comments about them. The comments are mostly about flowering dates in cultivation, and require some more work to sort them out properly. However, rather than keep them hidden for an indeterminate period, I have made BulbWeb available in a provisional form on the SABG web site⁵. Any comments will be welcomed by Audrey and I.

SABG meetings

Report on the Spring 2018 SABG meeting (continued)

Our last meeting was held on Sunday 8th April 2018 at our usual venue, the Badger Farm Community Centre near Winchester. The morning's proceedings, including the presentation by George Elder on winter-growing Cape bulbs, were reported in the previous Newsletter (no. 37).

Bill Squire began the proceedings after the lunch break, by commenting on the plants which members had brought for the display table. Many of these plants were Bill's. Starting with some *Lachenalias*, *Lachenalia bachmannii* was in flower, which was a first because in previous years the flowers had aborted. Bill put his success this year down to standing the plants in

an inch of water during the growing season, as the species comes from the Cape Flats area which can be wet in winter. The SANBI web-site describes this plant as growing in the "Swartland Shale Renosterveld, Cape Lowland Freshwater Wetlands, Lowland flats, on edges of vernal pools on clays" and says that the species is endangered because the "severely fragmented remaining subpopulations continue to decline as a result of overgrazing, fertiliser runoff and infilling of wetlands".

Other species included *Lachenalia juncifolia* (the label had another name); *L. membranacea* (considered to be a variety of *L. elegans* until the publication of Graham Duncan's 2012 book on *Lachenalias*) having conspicuous sterile flowers with unusually long pedicels at the top of the inflorescence; a really nice dwarf form of *L. pallida* with richly coloured purplish-pink flowers, much more colourful than the name suggests (photo below); *L. algoensis* from the south coast (east of Cape Town) which is often mistaken for the yellow form of the related *L. orchioides*, but the bulbs are more disc-shaped rather than rounded; the recently described *L. jussieui* from the Bredasdorp area (so new that even Google can't find it!); the pale blue-green flowers of *L. vanzyliae* are always admired (or at least commented on!), and there is a more intense turquoise one called *L. viridiflora* (not in the display); and finally an unusual species of *Lachenalia* with finely serrated leaf edges, from Namaqualand, whose name I did not record.



Lachenalia pallida on the display table, 8/4/2018

3 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wiki>

4 <https://sabg.tk/info/wiki>

5 <https://sabg.tk/bulbweb:start>



The display table (left-hand half), 8/4/2018

[Richard White]

There were a couple of plants of *Lachenalia bulbifera*. Bill said that Graham Duncan had reported that different forms of this species grown from seeds collected from every location from Elands Bay (on the west coast north of Cape Town) to George (on the south coast east of Cape Town) flowered over a six-month period, and varied in shade of colour as well. Several of Bill's *L. bulbifera* stocks have "escaped" into an outdoor sand plunge, intended for hardy alpines, where they have survived several winters.

In other genera there were *Ornithogalum maculatum*, with orange flowers with dark spots as implied by the name, but the first time Bill had seen one in cultivation that wasn't plain spotless orange, and *Albuca namaquensis*, which is a good example of its genus to grow as it is small and its flowers open well.

Paul then pointed out some of the plants he had brought, including two *Lachenalias*: a form of *L. violacea* (in the picture of the left end of the display table, on the left near the back) with a strong coconut scent, now split off under another name (my notes say *L. robbsii*, but again this name is not known to Google), and a nice darker form of *L. vanzyliae* from the west coast near Langebaans (just in front of the *L. violacea*). Another of his plants was *Bulbinella graminifolia*, which being relatively small is a good one to grow. Bill mentioned that there are four or five other species of a similar size; Bill had also tabled a plant of *B. graminifolia* (visible at the left rear in the right-hand display photo). The other plants Paul referred to were a red *Geissorhiza*, the same colour as a *Babiana* from the same area, both on the display table (in the left-hand photo), and an orange-yellow *Spiloxene* which might be *S. canaliculata*.



The display table (right-hand half), 8/4/2018

[Richard White]

Paul also mentioned his hardiness survey, which he is hoping to report on in his talk at the Autumn 2018 meeting on 7th October. There was general agreement that it is the wet, not the cold, which kills bulbs in the British winter climate. (Assuming I can refer to the "British climate" – a geography teacher at school said that "Britain doesn't have climate, only weather", meaning I think that it varies so much.) Someone else said that they struggle to keep *Dieramas* outside in the wet winter conditions.

Bill then showed some photos on the screen, starting with the question of how he finds bulbs when travelling in South Africa. He always looks out for burnt areas, wet patches by the side of gravel roads, and mole rat workings: mole rats burrow in search of bulbs. *Androcymbium* (or *Colchicum*) *coloratum* (which often goes under the names *burchellii* and *latifolium*) was growing in the edge of a gravel road. *Gladiolus venustus* from the Clanwilliam area has pink at the ends of the yellow petals. A bunch of reddish-pink furry flowers is all that is visible above ground of a parasitic plant called *Hyobanche sanguinea*. It is not a bulb, and indeed it has no roots (or leaves), only a stolon-like structure to find and steal nourishment from other plants' roots.

A road leading to Elandskloof near Citrusdal has a lot of interesting plants, including *Lapeirousia plicata*. Other photos included a red *Gazania*, and *Romulea komsbergensis* and *Lachenalia congesta* on the Komsberg (near Sutherland on the Roggeveld escarpment); the latter species is only seen as individuals, not in groups.

Other photographs included a *Babiana* with sharp-pointed leaves which normally grows in cracks between rocks, a small yellow-flowered *Bulbinella nutans*, a larger orange *Bulbinella latifolia* subsp. *doleritica* growing in the Nieuwoudtville nature reserve (it needs

an acidic soil, and other forms of the species are yellow), *Spiloxene serrata* in the same area, and the violet-purple *Lapeirousia oreogena* which makes a stunning potful. Although it is said to have germination inhibitors, fresh seed seems to grow well. A *Lachenalia* at Calvinia might be *L. mutabilis* or perhaps a new species.

An inflorescence of *Brunsvigia bosmaniae* had seeds germinating in the pods, presumably because this one had been caught in a shrub instead of continuing to roll along like a tumble-weed, so that not all the seeds had been shaken out. Like most Amaryllidaceae, the seed germinates quickly without any period of dormancy. The species is usually found along fences, where the seed-heads have accumulated.

Other pictures shown included a *Zaluzianskya* (not a bulb but commonly seen in the same areas), *Aloe dichotoma* (now *Aloidendron dichotomum*, the quiver tree or kokerboom) and *Lachenalia elegans* near Nieuwoudtville, *L. carnosa* with spotted leaves, *Lapeirousia arenicola* at Port Nolloth, the lovely pink *Lapeirousia silenoides* which often grows with the similarly coloured *Pelargonium incrassatum*, *Dipcadi crispum* var. *tortile*, a *Ferraria*, which are often much shorter in habitat than those grown in the UK, *Trachyantha falcata* and *Sparaxis metelerkampiae*, which has white-marked purple flowers which are bilaterally rather than radially symmetrical as found in many other *Sparaxis*.

In the Knersvlakte north of Vanrhynsdorp there are bulbs as well as the succulents such as *Conophytum* for which the area is known. *Crassula umbella* is a deciduous species which dies down to a bulb in summer. Bill finished his presentation with some rock formations in the Cederberg Wilderness north of Clanwilliam.

The next SABG meeting

Our next meeting will be held on **Sunday 7th October 2018** (not 8th October as stated in one place in Newsletter 37) 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 10.00, and the meeting will close at about 16.00.

The speaker for the morning session at approximately 11:00 will be our own Chairman Paul Cumbleton, who will talk on “*Growing and propagating South African winter-growing bulbs*”, thus continuing the theme of the April 2018 meeting and the report on George Elder’s presentation in Newsletter 37 (July 2018).

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.

Ben Turner will be bringing a large selection of bulbs for sale, including various species of autumn-flowering *Narcissus*, various members of the Araceae family, other assorted loose bulbs, plus a few potted bulbs. He has also divided a large *Clivia miniata* and will have some of this as well. He also has some books for sale and a few other items. In addition to the above, he expects to have a few bulbs of an unusual dwarf form of *Cyrtanthus brachyscyphus*, from Steven Thompson, which were originally obtained from an old collection in Denmark. He is keen to share the bulbs with the group via a donation table and Steven is very happy for bulbs to be distributed among SABG members.

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 2019 meeting

The Spring meeting will be on **Sunday 7th April 2019**, also at the Badger Farm Community Centre. Kit Strange from the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew is scheduled to give us a talk in the morning. More details will follow in due course.

Bulbils

South Africa has moved

Well, strictly and pedantically speaking this title is correct, thanks to plate tectonics causing continental drift. South Africa is moving apart from South America, India, Australia and Antarctica with which it was once joined, explaining, for example, the occurrence of Proteaceae and other plant families in some of those places, although the story is not quite this simple⁶.

The speed of this movement depends on where you're measuring it from, but it's probably about 2cm per year. I read that the positions of countries in the global GPS navigation system have to be updated every so often. For example, in 2016 Australia's position was corrected to allow for the 1.5 meters it had moved since last updated in 1996⁷, otherwise in due course your pizza might be delivered next-door and, more seriously, self-driving cars might end up on the wrong side of the road.

I don't know exactly how fast South Africa is moving relative to us, but I think it's coming our way, moving northwards. Africa is said to be bumping into Europe and pushed up the Alps in the resulting crumple zone⁸. (The Mediterranean Sea is not a deep ocean between plates, it is a shallow depression on top of the African plate.)

Enough geology/geography. The heading above actually refers to the South African Meadow at the RHS garden at Wisley in Surrey. I visited Wisley on 17th September 2018, and I was surprised to discover that the South African meadow has been relocated from its original position, as described for example in the SABG Newsletter no. 33, to a new location nearer to the Great Glasshouse, having appropriately moved northwards. The photo above is a general view of part of the new area, with an explanatory notice, also shown in close-up. Interestingly, the tall yellow flowers that look like Gerberas are in fact *Haplocarpha scaposa* (False Gerbera). There is a list of species introduced into the original South African meadow in a blog post⁹, and presumably many of these have made their way into the new meadow.



New South African meadow, Wisley, 17/9/2018
[Richard White]



New South African meadow, Wisley, 17/9/2018
[Richard White]

Another view (above) shows the Glasshouse, with the purple thistle *Berkheya purpurea* and Kniphofias. Flowering bulbs included *Crocsmia masoniorum* and *Gladiolus oppositiflorus* (photos below).

6 <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2007/08/070808101526.htm>

7 <https://news.nationalgeographic.com/2016/09/australia-moves-gps-coordinates-adjusted-continental-drift/>

8 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geology_of_the_Alps

9 <http://rhs-wisley.blogspot.com/2016/05/may-june-2015-south-african-meadow.html>



Crocosmia masoniorum in the South African meadow, 17/9/2018 [Richard White]

Also in flower were a pale lemon-yellow *Gladiolus* (with no markings visible from a distance), *Ornithogalum (Galtonia) candicans*, a species of *Eucomis*, *Agapanthus*, yellow Gazanias and no doubt other daisies, and a purple mesembryanthemum. As this was in mid-September, no doubt I had missed earlier flowerings. I must make a note to visit again next year earlier in the season!

In the next Newsletter

I plan to produce the next Newsletter (no. 39) for distribution later in 2018, after our Autumn meeting. I hope to include a summary of Paul’s talk at the October meeting. If you have anything you’d like to see included, please let know.



Gladiolus oppositiflorus in the South African meadow, 17/9/2018 [Richard White]

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Members of the IBSA Middelpoos excursion at Gannaga Pass, Tankwa Karroo, 1/9/2017 [Richard White]