



Southern African Bulb Group

www.sabg.tk

SABG Newsletter no. 43 January 2021

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News

- ★ The 2020 Bulb & Seed Exchanges were a great success, thanks to Jon Evans' hard work.
- ★ The SABG meeting planned for 11 October 2020 was cancelled.
- ★ The Badger Farm Community Centre in Winchester where we had our last meeting is now a Covid-19 vaccination centre.

Dates for your diary

- ★ Sunday 28th March 2021 (provisional): SABG Zoom meeting
- ★ Sunday 10th October 2021 (provisional): SABG meeting



From the Editor

A Happy New Year to you all! Now that Christmas is over, and most of us are not allowed to go anywhere else, we can tend our glasshouses and window-sills, and look forward to a better year in 2021, in due course.

Jon Evans has provided a report on the Bulb & Seed Exchange and the autumn Ephemeral Exchange, with photos to show just how hard he has worked on them for our benefit! Other items in

this Newsletter include some observations on Massonias and on growing South African bulbs with enhanced light, either using LED lamps or, more drastically, by moving to Spain or Portugal.

Incidentally, if you see any text between square brackets in someone else's article, it normally indicates an editorial addition by me, whereas text in round brackets (parentheses) is part of the original author's text.

Notices and Requests

Mystery *Albuca*

I try to collect *Albuca* species and find it difficult to source some of them. Maybe other members can help. I am ready to swap bulbs or seed or buy them, mere information would be a great help, too.

There is an *Albuca* I am particularly interested in. A very long time (about 35 years) ago I saw it growing and flowering in the greenhouse of Rupert Bowlby. Some of you may remember him. He ran a small bulb nursery.

It was a medium sized plant (around 40 or 50cm tall in flower) with a large exposed bulb and upright facing white flowers in a multi-flowered inflorescence. The remarkable feature was that the single flower was much bigger than *Albuca* flowers normally are and of a very bright white, opening flat. A very beautiful plant. I never acquired this bulb, maybe they were not for sale. This is written from memory, so some details might be incorrect. Unfortunately I have no name for this plant. Does my description ring a bell? Knowing the name would already be a big step forward. I have tried to find matching pictures in the internet without success. Also the descriptions of the South African seed firms never showed a matching item.

If you feel that you can help me with information, please contact me johannes-ulrich-urban@t-online.de

Uli Urban

Offers of plants and seeds

Lachenalia viridiflora seeds

I have completed my autumn seed planting programme for 2020 and I find that I have a modest quantity of surplus *Lachenalia viridiflora* seed in the pod left over. This material was hand pollinated earlier this year from three plants that I managed to get to flower under LED lights [see the last photo on page 7 in the section "*Lachenalia bachmannii* & *L. viridiflora*" in Newsletter 42, August 2020¹]

I have a single *Lachenalia alba* bulb from the 2018 exchange which has sprouted again [in early September]. Last year [2019-20] it grew well and flowered nicely and I would like to get another one, or

preferably two, so that I can pollinate and get some seed.

The offer is to swap the spare *L. viridiflora* seed for a couple of *L. alba* bulbs if anyone has any spares. Can you help? [Email sabg@rjwhite.tk if you can.]

David Lloyd

Clivia seeds and *Scilla madeirensis* seedlings

SABG member Peter Goldsmith mentioned in November that he has yellow (and orange/pastel) *Clivia* seed and a few *Scilla madeirensis* seedlings if anyone wants some. Please email him at viewpointforpg@gmail.com to ask whether any are still available (or contact me or another Committee member if you don't have email access).

SABG meetings

Committee meeting, 15 December 2020

An SABG Committee meeting was held on 15 December 2020, using the Zoom online video-conferencing software, as has become popular during 2020. Because of the cancellation of the two regular SABG meetings, when we normally slip in a Committee meeting during lunch or after the meeting, we had not had a Committee meeting since 6 October 2019.

Sue Bedwell resigned from the Committee, and the rest of the Committee thanked her for her hard work to make our meetings a success. We were pleased and relieved that she will continue to help whenever she can, but she did not want to be committed to attend every meeting in future. This means that in due course we shall be seeking a new Committee member, preferably one who can attend most meetings (when we resume having meetings, that is!)

We made tentative plans for SABG meetings in 2021, which are reported below. Among other topics discussed, we decided to move the end of the SABG financial year, previously at the end of September, to the end of the calendar year, 31 December 2020. For that reason, the annual statement of finance does not appear in this Newsletter, but will be in the next one.

We are making revisions to the Constitution proposed in Newsletter 42 but not yet formally adopted, in the light of feedback and discussion by the Committee. We will include this in the next Newsletter.

¹ <https://sabg.tk/media/newsletter:sabgnews42.pdf>

SABG meetings in 2021

Because the coronavirus emergency has not yet abated, our plans for meetings in 2021 have to remain tentative at the moment. However, we have decided on a couple of dates, provisionally.

The next SABG meeting

Our Spring 2021 meeting is planned for **Sunday 28th March 2021** and will be conducted as an online video meeting using Zoom. Assuming this proves to be feasible, details will be posted on the SABG web-site at <https://sabg.tk/meetings:next:start> and included in the next Newsletter.

We hope to include a main speaker and some time for discussion between members.

Sadly, it will not be possible to include plant display or sales tables. A substitute for a plant display table would be an online picture gallery. If members would like to submit photographs of their plants taken in 2021, with captions, by the day before the meeting at the latest, I will include them on the web-site and members will be able to comment on them at the Zoom meeting or afterwards.

If you have plants to sell or give away, and are prepared to pack and post them (probably within the UK only), please email details to me, preferably with photos, and I will put them on the web-site or in the Newsletter. If you expect to have bulbs available later, then of course the 2021 Bulb and Seed Exchange will be the easier way to distribute them. See Jon Evan's report on the 2020 Exchanges below.

SABG Autumn 2021 meeting

The Autumn meeting will provisionally be on **Sunday 10th October 2021**. At present, we are hoping it will be legal and safe for us to return to our pre-Covid normal meeting in a suitable hall, with speaker, plant sales and display. Obviously, it will not be possible to confirm this until later in the year.

2020 SABG Bulb and Seed Exchange report

The 2020 SABG Bulb and Seed Exchanges have now closed. The size of the operation was a little larger than last year. There were fewer items donated, but more requests and more packets sent out. Since there was no autumn meeting, a 'surplus' exchange was run to distribute any material left over. In addition, an exchange for 'ephemeral' seeds was conducted in mid-November.

As always, these exchanges are critically dependent on the generosity of relatively few members who donate material - huge thanks are due to all of them. I would urge more members to consider growing these plants from seed, which is less heavily in demand. When you have a pot of 2-3 yr old seedlings, maybe you can donate some back to the exchange.

	2020	2020 Surplus	2019
Donors	26		26
Items donated	537	56	577
Requests	77	12	65
Packets distributed	1931	88	1688

The material I received was generally well packed and cleaned, so my thanks to all the donors; this saves me a lot of work.

2019 packets of bulbs and seed were sent out in parcels to 77 members. Many items were oversubscribed this year; nevertheless nearly all members who requested less than 40 items received at least 80% of what they wished for. Members who requested more items than this received a smaller proportion, but still the vast majority of what they requested.

Allocation algorithms are always debatable, and donors get precedence; in general, if there is sufficient material of an item I will share it out among those who request it, so that I do not get left with surplus - I have no room to grow it on. This may mean small packets, or large ones, depending on availability and demand.

Items/genera in particular demand included:

South African

Albuca cooperi
Brunsvigia
Cyrtanthus montanus
Daubenya bulbs
Drimia haworthoides
Eriospermum
Hessea
Lachenalia viridiflora
Massonia (more uncommon species)
Nerine

Pelargonium

Resnova
Strumaria
Veltheimia bracteata
 'Lemon Flame' & *capensis*
Wurmbea

Other

Galanthus rizehensis
Hippeastrum stylosum
Narcissus

All the UK members who were not donors made generous donations to the group to cover postage and packing, and the exercise made an increased surplus for the group, which was welcome, and helps to support this exercise. Next year will pose some new challenges, and we do not yet know whether we will be able to include overseas members, either as donors or as recipients.

Ephemeral Seeds

Seed from some highly desirable species of bulbs, mainly amaryllids, germinates immediately regardless of treatment, and thus cannot be kept for the main exchange. If it is sent from South Africa, it is usually growing in the packet. I believe this is properly called ‘recalcitrant’ seed, but that brings to mind seed which doesn’t want to germinate rather than the reverse, so I use the word ‘ephemeral’. Such seed ripens mainly in a period of at most 2 – 3 months in the autumn.

This year, the distribution was significantly larger than last year, with many more donors donating incredibly generous packets of seeds (and bulbs) (many thanks), and nearly 10x as many packets were sent out. Despite this, all the amaryllid seeds were heavily in demand, as were the *Crinum* bulbs and some of the more uncommon *Oxalis*. I will be glad of even more seeds next year.

Details of the ‘ephemeral’ distribution are as follows:

	2020	2019
Donors	14	6
Items donated	95	16
Requests	53	17
Requested items	764	70
Packets distributed	531	59

The timing of the distribution caused problems this year, and many items were germinating before they were sent out. We will consider this further for next year, with the aim of being able to distribute seed in better condition. Nevertheless, I hope that many members will be successful with the material sent out.

Jon Evans

Jon sent four photos to show just how large an operation the Bulb & Seed Exchange has become:



2. Orders picked and being checked



1. Ready to start picking



3. Parcels packed



4. Off to the Post Office



Massonias are tougher than you might think!

I have two 8' x 4' wooden frames primarily for Massonias but also with a few small Lachenalias, Daubenyas and Polyxenas. The pots are in trays resting on a layer of sand with soil warming cables (in case of any frosts). As you can see from the second and third pictures, taken about six weeks after their initial watering this year, they seem happy with this arrangement.

But now look at the fourth and fifth pictures. The first of these appears to be a *Massonia pygmaea*, the second a *Polyxena pygmaea*.



The thing to notice, though, is that they are growing in a tray of discarded cyclamen compost. It was probably about three or four years old when I discarded it, and that was five or six years ago (so its nutrient value must now be pretty close to zero). It would consist of approximately 50% grit, 35% JI no 3 and 15% bark. I

have a faint recollection at some stage of emptying some ungerminated pots of *Massonia* and *Polyxena* seed on to it.

So for the last three years I have had both species happily growing and flowering. Indeed the *Polyxena* seems to be showing signs of spreading around. These self-germinated plants have been totally exposed to full afternoon sun and all the elements in that time that the south-east of England can throw at them, and yet they look as healthy as any of the (protected) bulbs in my frames. Interesting.

Anthony Murphy

Lachenalias, light levels and Lusitania

Our members have found different ways to improve the amount of light our winter-growing bulbs receive.

Lachenalias under LEDs

Here are three more photos from David Lloyd, to follow on from the *Lachenalia bachmannii* and *L. viridiflora* in Newsletter 42, mentioned earlier. He writes:

Here is a link to the LED lights that I used, this one is currently unavailable but there are other similar ones. I liked it because the lights are manoeuvrable and have an output of 24 watts and it has a built in timer.

<https://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/product/B07C5Q8VZ4/>

The *L. bachmannii* produced a few seeds this year and I have plans to see if I can grow some this autumn [2020], they do seem to like sitting in standing water.

David Lloyd



Lachenalia aloides var. *nelsonii* (David Lloyd)



Lachenalia pallida (David Lloyd)



Massonia aff. *depressa* (David Lloyd)

Growing SA bulbs in Iberia

Two new SABG members have moved from northern Europe (UK and Germany) to Spain and Portugal respectively, and report that the higher light levels and lack of winter frosts make for successful cultivation of South African bulbs outdoors.

Portugal

Johannes-Ulrich (Uli) Urban said “the light level and the climate here in Portugal allow me to grow all my winter growing bulbs in the open with excellent results compared to my greenhouse in Germany before the move”. He sent some photos taken with his iPad, which will certainly brighten our spirits during the winter lockdown!



Lachenalia aloides in Winter



Babiana species or hybrid in Spring



Amaryllis belladonna Rose Foncé, 28 August 2020



Succulents and bulbs in spring. *Iris xiphium* subsp. *lusitanica* and *Watsonia marginata* in the background. *Ornithogalum arabicum* flowers closed on a rainy day



Zantedeschia Glencoe, probably nothing special for a UK gardener but I have loved them from childhood ... and they do so well here



Veltheimia bracteata in the open garden, so far coping with the Arabian mint from Jordan



A good clump of *Moraea ochroleuca*, saved from the collection of the late John Lavranos



Albuca fragrans in the foreground, a touch of chaos with my potted bulbs in the background. The garden infrastructure is not finished yet.

Southern Spain

I see a lot of winter sunshine here in southern Spain and my South African plants welcome this as much as I do. But the long hot summers can be challenging and it's always a great relief to see the new shoots of my S.A. bulbs and other geophytes emerge from their empty-looking pots come September, after being thoroughly baked over the previous few dormant months!

I have simple shade structures for my plants, so no rain shelter, just minimal protection from the most intense UV rays and from wildlife who can and will otherwise dig up plants, munch leaves and potentially complicate any pollination efforts. I should go check on things now in fact – we're currently plagued by swarms of hungry grasshoppers and even one of them can do a lot of damage (mostly cosmetic rather than fatal) if it finds its way into a shadehouse.

Catherine Arthur

Bulbils

Update on unidentified *Tulbaghia*

In the Notices and requests section of the previous Newsletter (42), Ian Nex provided a couple of photos of an unknown *Tulbaghia*, and wondered whether it was possibly *T. cominsii*.

David Ross got in touch with me to say “I don't think it is *T. cominsii* and I attach a paper by Dr Vosa. I am not sure what it is, but it looks like an interesting plant that I don't have in my collection.”

The paper he referred to is a revision of the genus *Tulbaghia* based mainly on chromosome evidence². I believe there has been at least one species described since that revision, but it may still be useful. Don't be put off by all the chromosome illustrations, it has useful-looking descriptions, a key and quite a few colour photos towards the end. I've put a copy in the SABG “digital library” at <https://sabg.tk/library:start>

A flower that hides from humans

A short piece on p. 23 of “The Week” magazine on 5 December 2020 reported that “Some plants are known to have changed their colours to give them camouflage protection from herbivores. Now, one species seems to have performed the same trick to hide from humans. The *Fritillaria delavayi* grows in the Hengduan mountains of China, where it is harvested for use in Chinese medicine. Every June after its fifth year, it produces a lone bright green flower – making it easy to spot on the rocky slopes. But after learning that it was becoming harder to find, researchers from China and the UK investigated: they examined the plants in various places, and interviewed local pickers to ascertain how much harvesting took place in each of those locations.

“They found that in areas where the plant was most heavily harvested, it tended to have developed dull grey flowers and leaves, so that it now blends in. “It's remarkable to see how humans can have such a direct and dramatic impact on the coloration of wild organisms, not just on their survival but on their evolution itself”, said Prof. Martin Stevens, of the University of Exeter's Centre for Ecology and Conservation.”

In the next Newsletter

I plan to produce the next Newsletter (no. 44) for distribution in Spring 2021. Do let me know of anything you would like to be included.

SABG Committee

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² Canio G. Vosa (2000) A revised cytotaxonomy of the genus *Tulbaghia* (Alliaceae), *Caryologia*, 53:2, 83-112, DOI: 10.1080/00087114.2000.10589184