



## Southern African Bulb Group

www.sabg.uk

# SABG Newsletter no. 47 October 2022

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## News

- ★ The Autumn 2022 Ephemeral Exchange is under way
- ★ Please see my question about your email newsletter delivery preference in the Notices and Requests section on page 2

## Dates for your diary

- ★ Saturday 22nd October: NAAS display and short talks in the Hilltop Building at RHS Wisley
- ★ Sunday 23rd October: SABG Autumn 2022 meeting in Winchester, UK
- ★ Sunday 23rd October: SABG Ephemeral Exchange submission deadline

## From the Editor

This Sunday, 23rd October, is a significant date – it's the date of our next meeting in Winchester, but also the date by which you need to let Jon Evans know about any seeds (or bulbs) you are able to donate to the 2022 Ephemeral Exchange.

In this edition of the Newsletter, just as our 2022 Bulb & Seed Exchanges are drawing to a close, we have a report by Jon Evans on the 2021 Exchanges, which I had inadvertently omitted from the previous Newsletter.

Other items in this Newsletter include several new and older books which have come to my attention recently. I have included digital copies or links to them in the gradually expanding SABG Digital Library, as described in the "Books" section later in this Newsletter. Do let me know of any other books which might be of interest to members, whether in digital

(electronic) or paper format, and I will add them to the list.

You will also find in this newsletter several contributions from members about various bulb topics. These are always most welcome, so don't hesitate to let me know about anything you come across which might interest members. It doesn't matter whether you send me rough notes or polished purple prose, short or long, with or without pictures, on anything to do with South African bulbs (or indeed those from surrounding countries, as implied by the name of our Group, or even regions with similar "Mediterranean" climate), at home or in the wild. While on the scope of our interest, we are not pedantic about the precise botanical meaning of the term "bulb", and most members are interested in all "geophytes", with bulbs, corms, tubers or other underground storage organs to allow them to survive periods of dormancy during the dry season.

Uli Urban has been busy developing new techniques for growing South African bulbs. In the article on *Albuca clanwilliamae-gloria* in Newsletter 46, he described his technique for microwaving pollen to overcome self-incompatibility, which was also described in more detail and illustrated in the Pacific Bulb Society Wiki (the link was in Newsletter 46).



Companion planting: *Lachenalia aloides*, *Babiana melanops* and *Oxalis obtusa* MV 6235 [Uli Urban]

Uli has also sent some more photos which appear in this newsletter to brighten up the expanses of text. One of the photo captions (above) mentions "companion planting", the practice of growing two or more species in the same container, for their mutual benefit. This is another technique he has been promoting, with an article in the PBS newsletter "*The Bulb Garden*"<sup>1</sup>, volume 18, issue 1 (September 2020) and a second article to appear shortly.

1 <https://www.pacificbulbsociety.org/pbsforum/index.php?page=Newsletter>

You need to be a member of the PBS Forum in order to be able to read *The Bulb Garden*. Joining the Forum is free: you don't have to be a paying member of the PBS. At present it appears that only volume 17 issue 4 (May 2020, containing another version of Jonathan Hutchinson's *Scadoxus* report) and earlier are available online, so we may have to wait a while to see Uli's companion planting articles. If you are a paying member of the PBS, you should receive printed copies of *The Bulb Garden* by post.



*Amaryllis belladonna* cultivar – see later [Greg Plenty]

## Notices and Requests

### *SABG newsletter delivery: please answer this question*

The system I use to send out newsletters and other communications by email to all SABG members will only send a maximum of 200 in one hour. As we have more than 200 members, this means that I have two email lists, and send to one an hour later than the other. However, as you have probably noticed, there are two ways to send bulky items such as newsletters: as an attachment, or by providing a web link which you have to click on to download and read the newsletter.

The first method has the advantage that the newsletter will be available immediately whenever you want it (assuming you don't delete the email before saving the newsletter), but the disadvantage is that it makes the email much larger and some people's email provider or software may therefore delay or even reject it.

The second method makes for much smaller emails, and thus avoids that risk, but requires you to remember to download the newsletter yourself, before you lose track of the email. (Of course, you can also download the newsletters from the web-site.)

Because I have two email lists, I could put members preferring the first method into one list and those preferring the second method into the other list. A few members have already expressed a preference for one method or the other. It would be very helpful if all members could let me know which method you prefer.

### *SABG web-site*

In the previous Newsletter I mentioned that we are now using the web address (URL) of [sabg.uk](http://sabg.uk) as well as the original sabg.tk. No-one has reported any problems, so please change any bookmarks ("favourites") that you have saved and use the [sabg.uk](http://sabg.uk) address in future. The sabg.tk address is set to expire in January 2025, so there's no need to worry about it immediately. You may also notice that I am increasingly using some email addresses in the sabg.uk domain.

I have added a "dark theme" to our web pages. This provides the choice of having light text on a dark background as an alternative to the traditional theme with dark text on a light background. You can change from one to the other at any time by clicking on the icon with the words "[Toggle theme](#)" at the top right of the web page.

This choice is provided by a new extension to the web-site, which is somewhat experimental at present. It should work on a computer, laptop, tablet or mobile phone. Please let me know if you have any comments or preferences.

As well as being fashionable, some people may prefer the reduced glare, especially for those late evening web browsing sessions when it is good to reduce exposure to bright light, especially blue light. It is also said to reduce the power consumption and hence prolong battery life when using a mobile phone or tablet or other battery-powered device, thus allegedly helping to reduce your fuel bills and save the planet!

While mentioning the web site, don't forget that most

web browsers let you increase (or decrease) the text font size of the text by pressing the **Ctrl** and **+** (or **-**) keys.



*Ferraria arenosa* [Uli Urban]

## SABG meetings

### *The next SABG meeting*

Our next meeting will be held on **Sunday 23rd October 2022**, at our usual meeting room in Winchester.

Jonathan Hutchinson will be talking about his trip to Zimbabwe in search of *Scadoxus*, and there will be one or two smaller talks after lunch. More details about the meeting are shown on our web-site at <https://sabg.tk/meetings:next:start>, and directions are at <https://sabg.tk/meetings:hall:badger:start>. The doors will open at 10.00, and the meeting will close at about 14.30.

As usual, there will be a display table for any plants that you bring along for others to see. We will have time for some informal discussion 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 12.00 until 13.00. 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 2023 meeting

A date for the Spring meeting has not yet been set, but it will probably be on a **Sunday in April 2023**. More details of the meeting will follow in due course.

## Report on the 2021 Bulb & Seed Exchanges

The size of the 2021 SABG Bulb and Seed Exchange operation was a little larger than in the previous year. There were more items donated, and roughly the same number of orders and packets sent out. Since there was no autumn meeting in 2021, a 'surplus' exchange was run to distribute any material left over. In addition, an exchange for 'ephemeral' seeds was conducted in mid-November. With the earlier distribution of the late Terry Smale's bulbs, that made a huge workload which I was glad to have finished.

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 bulbs 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.

	2021	2021 Surplus	2020 incl. Surplus	2019
Donors	31		26	26
Items donated	706	75	537	577
Requests	73	13	89	65
Packets distributed	1848	170	2019	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.

2018 packets of bulbs and seed were sent out in parcels to 75 members. As last year, many items were oversubscribed this year; some members requested many of these, and as a result only received 50-70% of what they requested, though for most that figure was over 80%.



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.

All the 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.

### 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. 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, donations were down, but the distribution was bolstered by an experimental offer of *Rhodohypoxis* corms which proved popular. Although the number of requests was also down, as usual all the amaryllid seeds were heavily in demand. I will be glad of even more seeds next year.

Details of the ‘ephemeral’ distribution are as follows:

	2021	2020	2019
Donors	13	14	6
Items donated	61	95	16
Requests	27	53	17
Requested items	295	764	70
Packets distributed	242	531	59

The timing of the distribution continues to cause problems (really we need to run two, one at the end of September, and another two months later). We will consider other ways of managing this this 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

### Books

#### *Photographic guide to the wild flowers of the Limpopo Province*

This is volume 44 in the “*Strelitzia*” journal of SANBI, the South African National Biodiversity Institute, by Sylvie Kremer-Köhne, published in 2021. Many thanks to Mark Wessels for drawing my attention to it. In 376 pages it covers the Limpopo province in northern South Africa, bordering Botswana, Zimbabwe and Mozambique. It is not restricted to bulbs, but being a comprehensive survey there are many included among the 770 species covered, with 3 species per page, arranged first by colour and second by family. It can be read or downloaded from SANBI<sup>2</sup> or from the SABG digital library at [sabg.uk/library:start](http://sabg.uk/library:start).

<sup>2</sup> <http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12143/8051>

## Plants of Northern Botswana

I know that many SABG members are interested in other African plants, not just bulbs. If you are one of these, you might note that PostScript Books<sup>3</sup> are currently selling the “*Field Guide to the Plants of Northern Botswana including the Okavango Delta*” edited by Alison and Roger Heath, published by Kew in 2009. It’s now £19.99 instead of the original £85. You can see a few sample pages at the NHBS web site<sup>4</sup>, but it will cost you £59.99 from that supplier.

## The Genus *Lachenalia*

This comprehensive, authoritative and substantial tome by Graham Duncan in the Kew Botanical Magazine Monographs series is again (or still!) available from PostScript books at a discounted price of £50 (an increase on the previous £40, but the publisher’s price is £130). It is of course a companion volume to *The Genus Agapanthus* reviewed in the previous Newsletter, and PostScript also have *The Genus Cyclamen* at a discounted price.

## Other books

In case you think I’m giving too much prominence to PostScript books, you will find many more books on South African plants on the NHBS web-site<sup>5</sup> (click on “Bookstore” near the top, then use the categories on the left to narrow down) and at Keith’s Plant Books<sup>6</sup> which has some prices reduced until the end of October (choose “African Plants” on the left).

While browsing in the shop at RHS Wisley recently, I came across a new series of booklets on cultivated plant varieties which have been awarded the RHS Award of Garden Merit (AGM). The series is called “RHS Grower Guides”<sup>7</sup>: they are tall slim booklets with a photo and brief notes of each AGM variety. There are editions for “AGM *Agapanthus*” and “AGM hardy *Nerine*”. Both include cultural notes and hardiness ratings and cost £3 each. There are several others, including one on Alliums and a trial report in a different format on *Crocasmias*.

They can be downloaded as PDF files from the RHS web-site shown in the footnote. I have put the *Agapanthus*, *Crocasmia* and *Nerine* volumes in the

3 <https://www.psbooks.co.uk/guide-to-the-plants-of-n-botswana-inc-okavango-delta>

4 <https://www.nhbs.com/field-guide-to-the-plants-of-northern-botswana-book>

5 <https://www.nhbs.com>

6 <http://www.keithsplantbooks.co.uk/>

7 <https://www.rhs.org.uk/plants/trials-awards/plant-trials/growerguides>

SABG digital library mentioned above.

## Bulbils

### *Amaryllis belladonna* and hybrids

The picture and notes below arose in communications between SABG members Greg Plenty and Jon Evans in September this year. Greg kindly agreed to let me include his notes and photos in this Newsletter. I hope you enjoy them!

The plants often referred to as Belladivas are hybrids between *Amaryllis belladonna* and *Nerine bowdenii*, usually called  $\times$ *Amarine belladiva* or  $\times$ *Amarine tubergenii* ‘Belladiva series’, where the  $\times$  indicates that the genus is a hybrid between two genera. Note that there is, coincidentally, a brief illustrated report on two  $\times$ *Amarine* cultivars in the RHS pamphlet  *$\times$ Amarine Roundtable Report 2021* which is in our digital library mentioned above<sup>8</sup>.

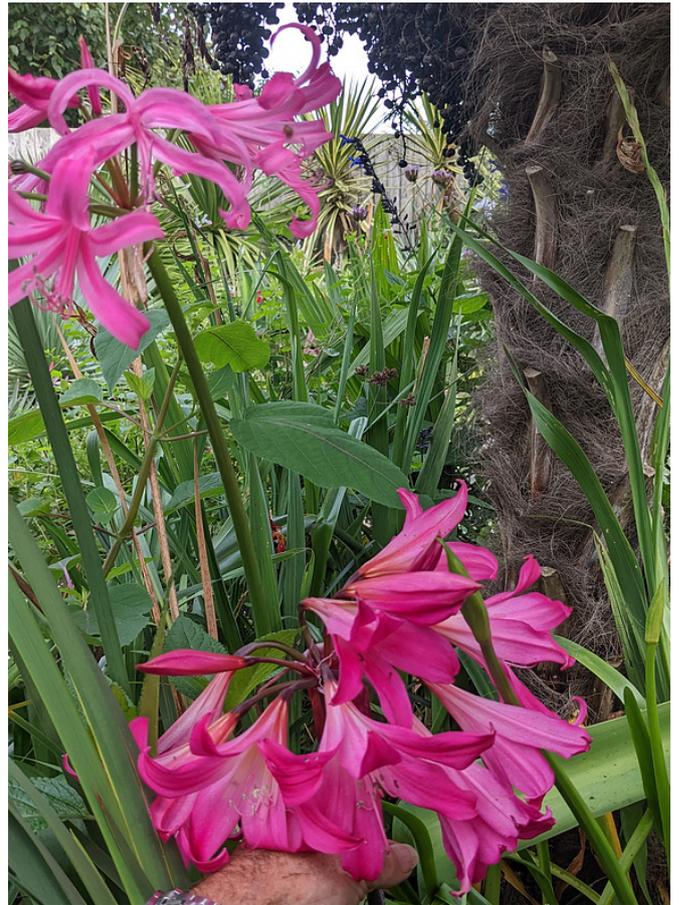


This has been my best year yet for *Amaryllis belladonna* since we moved to Ferring in 2013. They are a mixture of purchased ones called “Galaxy hybrids”, seedlings from ‘Hannibal’ crosses and self sown ones from when they were planted in our previous place in Portugal. I bought a lot back and distributed them via the bulb exchanges and meetings about five years ago. I wonder how they’ve got on?

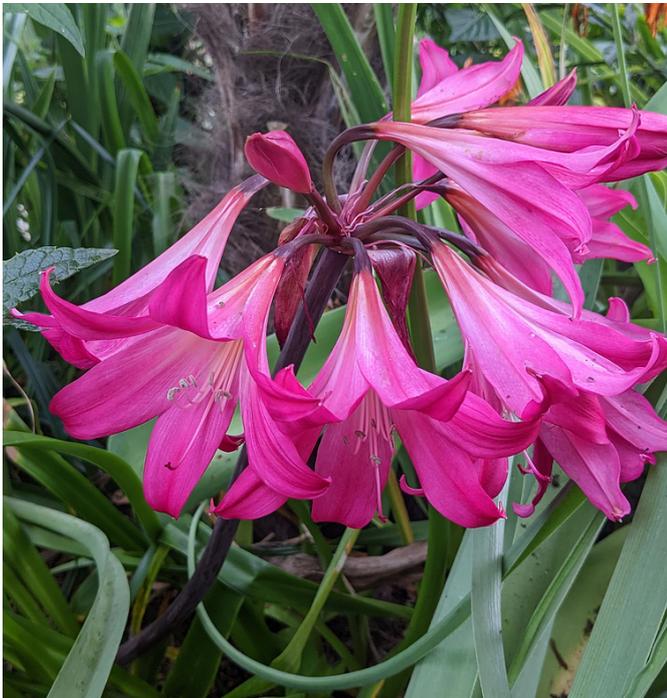
8 [https://sabg.uk/media/library:rhs\\_x\\_amarine\\_roundtable\\_report\\_2021.pdf](https://sabg.uk/media/library:rhs_x_amarine_roundtable_report_2021.pdf)



The big clump of eleven spikes is growing in a dry fairly sunny spot under a *Trachycarpus*. I've tried a couple under a sycamore tree and finally they are flowering.



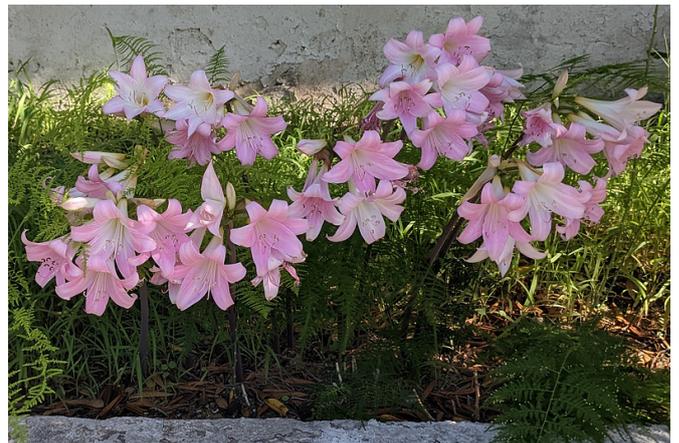
Here are some ordinary ones growing on Vulcano, Sicily [below]. Some in full shade about to flower [next page].



The dark one is amongst other things and never flowered before in this country.

Strangely the ones on the succulent bed haven't done anything yet, they normally flower a bit.

This form of *×Amarine belladiva* is much taller than the *Amaryllis* beneath it:



I think growing in the ground is best, although John Davies, whom you may know, has them flowering in oak half barrels now, I think.

Also, the dark red one might be from Thompson and Morgan seed or bulbs of many many years ago. I wonder if any other member grows them still?

*Greg Plenty*



### Germinating *Cyrtanthus* seeds in water

The following might be of interest to members acquiring seeds in the current Ephemeral Exchange. One of our members, Mr A. Pugh-Thomas, raised a question about an article he'd seen on germinating *Cyrtanthus* seeds in water. It wasn't in our newsletter, at least not recently, and I didn't remember this topic, so I did a search online. This turned up a web page about sprouting *Cyrtanthus falcatus* seeds in cups of water<sup>9</sup>.

Some other pages talk about the need to break dormancy with cold storage, smoke water or abrasion, so there seems to be disagreement (or variation) in whether *Cyrtanthus* seeds will germinate with just soaking.

A technical article ("*Seed germination and emergence of two *Cyrtanthus* species*"<sup>10</sup>), whose full text is not available free of charge, seems to conclude that special treatments are not effective: "The best germination was observed at 20°C although it did not differ significantly from other temperature treatments. Younger seed (less than 6 months from harvesting) germinated better than older seed. Seed pre-treatment (including smoke water) applications did not significantly improve the germination percentage and medium did not significantly affect the emergence of seed."

Incidentally, for web searches like these I now use DuckDuckGo, which respects your privacy, unlike Google, and may even provide more useful results because it doesn't give extra weighting to advertisers.

### Pollination of South African Amaryllidaceae

While talking about Amaryllidaceae, and also perhaps relevant to Jonathan Hutchinson's talk at the SABG meeting on Sunday, here is an article "*Butterfly-wing pollination in Scadoxus and other South African Amaryllidaceae*"<sup>11</sup> brought to my attention thanks to Carl Garnham. It neatly connects my interests in SA bulbs and in butterflies!

The full text of the article can be read. It includes colour illustrations of the flowers of nine species "suspected or confirmed to be pollinated via butterfly wings", including several widely grown in cultivation (*Nerine sarniensis*, *Clivia miniata* and several *Cyrtanthus*). There are also photographs of the culprits caught in the act.

### SABG Committee

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*Freesia* hybrid [Uli Urban]

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9 <https://strangewonderfulthings.com/tips423.htm>

10 [https://www.ishs.org/ishs-article/1273\\_41](https://www.ishs.org/ishs-article/1273_41)

11 <https://academic.oup.com/botlinnean/article/193/3/363/5803307>