

The Southern African Bulb Group

Newsletter No. 8

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Committee: Mick Reed (Membership secretary and Newsletter editor), Margaret Corina (Treasurer), Stefan Rau and Terry Smale.

If you have any difficulty reading this Newsletter, either on the computer screen or printed copy let me know at email: mick.reed@blueyonder.co.uk or by telephone to 01293 420975

The seed and bulb exchange proved to be very successful. Basically it worked very well although there may be a few minor adjustments for next year's exchange. A very big THANK YOU to the donors who really sent far more items than I had ever envisaged. Naturally the choice items were soon snapped up and I have several items left over. The seeds will be packed and the bulbs will be potted and will be on sale at Corfe Mullen.

The S.A. Bulb Group welcomes articles, short notes and other material relating to Southern African bulbs, especially items relating to plants being grown in the garden without any special protection.

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Dr David L. Corina – 1943 to 2007

David Corina was a familiar figure at Southern African Bulb Group meetings, accompanied by his wife Margaret. In fact, they attended every SABG meeting from the first founding meeting in Terry Smale's back garden, where the weather was cold and the tradition of serving hot soup originated, to the latest meeting at Crawley on 25th March this year. At that meeting and at the Spring Flower and Garden Show at Broadlands, Hampshire, in early April he was already feeling unwell, but made no complaints. He was later found to be suffering from liver cancer, which progressed rapidly but relatively painlessly. He died from liver and kidney failure on 14th May, aged 64.

The funeral was held at Southampton Crematorium on May 31st, with donations being made for Cancer Research UK. It was an indication of the respect in which he was held by many people that, despite the lack of close family, the service was attended by well over a hundred people. Many had to stand around the sides and rear of the East Chapel, as the pews were full. There were many colleagues from his working days at Southampton University, and many friends and acquaintances who were members of several branches of the British Cactus and Succulent Society in the south of England. The service was followed by a reception at the nearby Hilton Hotel. Again, the numbers of guests exceeded expectations and the management frequently had to replenish supplies of rolls and cakes and drinks.

David was born on 28th January 1943 into a family with Italian origins. His working life was devoted to scientific research in biochemistry, starting with a BSc from Sheffield University. He enrolled as a research student at the University of Southampton in 1965 and obtained a PhD degree in biochemistry in 1968, followed by two years as a postdoctoral research fellow. He joined the permanent staff of the Biochemistry Department at Southampton University in 1971, and became a Principal Experimental Officer, specialising in the use and maintenance of a large complicated machine called a mass spectrometer, which could be fed an extract from some plant or animal material of interest and it would say what it contained, or at least plot mysterious graphs which David could interpret. Colleagues said that he had "superb analytical skills".

Meanwhile, he met Margaret while she was studying horticulture from 1964 to 1966 at the former School of Horticulture for Ladies at Waterperry, near Oxford, now the Waterperry Gardens. They were married two weeks after she finished her course. However, at that stage he didn't know one plant from another – this is quite normal for biochemists, who can tell you the function of the various compounds in a plant's cells, but not important things like whether it's a rewarding plant to grow and when to water it.

Talking of bulbs, although Margaret was the more taken by what he once described as a strange interest in pots which for large parts of the year appeared to be empty, David was by no means just Margaret's chauffeur. Margaret is happy to take the blame for instilling his interest in plants. In addition to the SABG, this took the form of an enthusiasm for succulent plants and membership of the BCSS.

Although the Biochemistry Department at Southampton University merged with the Biology Department, where I worked before I got a job at Cardiff University, to form the School of Biological Sciences, that was not where I first met David. In fact he took the opportunity of

early retirement not long after the merger. I first got to know him long before that, as the important official in the BCSS Southampton Branch from which one could purchase black BEF pots. This was an important advantage to be gained by attending Southampton branch meetings, because the BEF pots were (and I believe still are under new management) the best one could obtain. (Even now I have many that are 20 to 30 years old and still as good as new, whereas ordinary common or garden centre pots have long since cracked and disintegrated under the influence of the elements; Southampton was even superior to Portsmouth branch, which stocked only the less attractive terracotta-coloured BEF range.)

David was Pots and Sundries Officer at Southampton branch for many years, and was therefore always in demand at meetings. He also assisted Margaret when she could be persuaded to speak to the branch about her plant interests (which include the Geraniaceae, which we referred to as "Margaret's weeds", as well as bulbous plants), but mostly David was valued for his role as an expert interrupter who could always remember the name or other detail which Margaret might have forgotten. In addition to their work and support for SABG meetings, the pair were also regular supporters and hard workers at the various shows and other events staged or attended by Southampton branch of the BCSS. During the last few years, after I left Southampton, they also took over the role of branch secretary; Margaret was already the branch treasurer, using the expertise and trust she had gained as payroll officer at British American Tobacco in Southampton.

I, and I am sure all other members of the SABG, wish to express our condolences to Margaret and look forward to seeing her and sharing her enthusiasm for our plants at many more meetings.

Richard White

"Plant display at the Crawley meeting in March 2007, with David Corina in the background at the plant sales end".



**Meeting on
Sunday 23rd September 2007
at Corfe Mullen Village Hall (Dorset)**

The hall will be open from 10.30 am to 4.00 pm

Speakers: Mike Salmon: Bulbs of North Africa
(Owner of the Monocot Nursery in Somerset)

We should have most of the afternoon free so please bring along plants and pictures to discuss. There will be both slide and digital projectors available so either format is acceptable.

Corfe Mullen is situated north of Poole (A35) and south of Wimborne Minster (A31). There will be fluorescent arrows from the A35/A350 junction and from the A31/A349 junction. (These arrows are used for the Alpine Garden Society summer show and they are easy to follow.)

There is adequate parking and the hall is fairly large. We hope that as many members as possible will make the effort to attend. I should point out here that the Group has no public liability insurance. The rent for the hall has come from Group funds and there will be no charge to the members attending. There is no charge for a sales table but donations to Group funds would be appreciated. I would like to remind members that this is re-potting time and sales of dry bulbs will be welcome. The hall has a kitchen and tea and coffee will be available. I would suggest we take packed lunches, as Corfe Mullen is a small village and the only other food available is at the local pub.

Will you please notify Audrey Cain if you are able to attend. Her email address is audrey@cain.net or telephone me on (023) 8077 9057.

Wanted: Seed or material of *Gladiolus vaginatus*

Bill Squire Tel. No. 01202 387107 8 Benmoor Road, Creekmoor, Poole, Dorset, BH17 7DS

Wanted: Members notes on growing Southern African Bulbs outside in the UK. for the next Newsletter.

Mick Reed

A VIEW ON CULIVATION OF DAUBENYA, MASSONIA, POLYXENA AND WHITEHEADEA

By Gordon Summerfield

It would be very presumptuous (and ill-advised) for me to prescribe how the various species within the four genera, should be grown, particularly as experience has taught me that there is no *hard and fast rule* to the successful cultivation of all the South African geophytes. Soil composition, light, temperature, natural precipitation and aspect all play a part to one degree or another, depending on where the bulbs are in cultivation. The accounts of both David Victor and Pieter Knippels in IBSA bulletin No.55 confirm this to be so. However, I am very happy to share my own methods and observations.

Being neither a trained horticulturist nor a technical individual I opted for a “common sense” approach – “Keeping it simple stupid” works for me!

I believe there are three crucial elements and these are:-

1. SOIL MIX
2. HABITAT
3. MAINTENANCE

each of which will be dealt with in more detail.

1. SOIL MIX

The composition of the soil must provide an element of nutrition, bearing in mind that Western Cape, Karoo and Namaqualand soils are generally nutrient deficient. I avoid the use of superphosphates and highly nitrogenous fertilizers. An issue that I largely overlooked, to my detriment, was the pH level of the potting mix I used. I raised this at the last IBSA symposium in 2006. Most soil throughout the Cape floral region is of an acidic nature and can vary from 3.3 to 5.5 and very occasionally to between 6.0 and 6.5. Since lowering the pH on some new plantings I have done this season, the improved results have been quite noticeable and very encouraging. To achieve a lower pH, one can apply Aluminium sulphate, finely powdered sulphur or specific fertilizers such as ammonium sulphate or ammonium nitrate. However be **very wary of the latter two**, too strong an application can cause severe burning with quite disastrous results.

I have used a locally manufactured compound marked for the application to Azaleas, Camellias and Rhododendrons. The composition of the 500 gram container is by mass; Al - 35g per kg.

Fe - 78g per kg.
S - 196g per kg.

For a 20cm diameter pot, I add a level teaspoon to the potting mix before planting, 18cm or less approximately ½ teaspoon and 30 cm about 1½ teaspoons.

A further negative that I have had to contend with, is the chlorination of our domestic tap water. Although the pH of the water is normally around 6.5 to 7.00 it has on occasions exceeded 8.00! So this is an issue that I have had to manage, again with results that are encouraging.

Good drainage is of course fundamental to the successful cultivation of all geophytes. I am fortunate to be able to acquire good gritty “Berg river” sand to which I add on a ratio of 3 to 1 a commercially available potting soil with a neutral pH. Alternatively I am also experimenting with sieved acidic mushroom based compost but beware of any fungi which could be present.

2. HABITAT

The majority of winter rainfall geophytes in the natural habitat will be found growing in a South to South East aspect through to a neutral elevation ie. A level aspect. I have therefore tried to replicate this in my nursery – resulting in most of my plants receiving morning/midday sun through to about 3 pm.

The heavy evening dews and higher rainfall experienced at the coast tend to play havoc with many inland species creating problems such as rust, mildew, crown rot etc. So much so that I cultivate these under cover. The exception to this are those which occur naturally along the coastal region which are obviously more tolerant of the damp conditions. These are:-

MASSONIA depressa	POLYXENA brevifolia
“ pustulata	“ corymbosa
DAUBENYA zeyheri	

3. MAINTENANCE

From the Display Table at Crawley 2006

Lapeirousia oreogena

This is one of the very desirable bulbs of South Africa. It grows along the Bokkeveld Plateau and the Western Karoo in thick red clay and always when I have seen it in habitat, grows as individual plants rather than in groups. In habitat it blooms from August to September. Summer temperatures can reach 30 to 40°C and snow is common on the high ground during winter. I grow my bulbs in my normal 3 part mix, equal parts J.I. No.3, leafmould and grit 4-5mm size. I find with *L. oreogena* that seed is slow to germinate and even slower to reach flowering size, i.e. 4-5 years (perhaps I am growing it wrong!) Here in the U.K. the plant flowers in early Spring and is a real gem. If seed is available 'go for it' it's well worth the long wait to see the flowers.

Thoughts and Observations

Bill Squire

Because of the recent flood I thought how unpredictable our seasons are and possibly seasons when the rains come early and times when the rains come late elsewhere in the world. I wondered how this would affect my South African bulbs here in the UK so I decided this year, 2007, that I would water them and S.A. seed the last week in July rather than in mid-September as I would normally do and at the same time keeping notes on their progress.

5.8.07 Most surprising my pot of *Albuca juncifolia* was the first to germinate but nothing else was to move for another week.

12.8.07 Quite a lot of movement today, three *Tritonia sp. Laxifolia*, *hyplina* and one other all showing growth also *Lachenalia latifolia* now renamed *L. nevosa* (I think botanists must have shares in plastic label firms !!!) and several others, *Pelargonium incrassatum*, *Gladiolus ochroleucus* and *dalenii*.

14.8.07 Today the temperature has dropped considerably with heavy rain and strong winds. Foliage is now showing on six more *Lachenalias* among them *L. obscura*, *bowkeri*, *haarlemensis* and *L. aloides* plus *Massonia pygmaea*.

15.8.07 Today I noticed that *Albuca humilis* that was sown Feb. 06 is in full flower (I wonder if this is the norm for this sp. I have no idea as this is the first time I've grown it from seed. If only all S.A. seeds matured this quick!)

16.8.07 More Lachenalias showing growth today, *L. namaquensis*, *aloides* var. collected at Picketberg, also *Boophane diticha*, several *Gladiolus* including *G. gueinzii*, *vandermererei* & *carminius* the latter in full flower. Others noticed today are *Sparaxis tricolour* & *grandiflora*.

NOTE from your editor..

The Group is getting more material for Newsletters etc. and we are considering placing the information on a website where you can read it direct from your monitor or download it for further reading. I would send an emailing just stating that the Newsletter was now on the website.

Can I have comments from members as to whether they agree with this proposal.

My Enthralment with Crocosmia by Mark Fox

My name is Mark Fox, I live in Lincolnshire and am now a proud National Collection Holder of Crocosmia with Full Status, which I got in Feb this year.

I started collecting Crocosmia around 7 years ago now.... I have always had Lucifer (or the seedling of) in my garden, and loved the beautiful Red Flowers.

I happened to visit a local garden centre around 7 years ago, and found some other Crocosmia there. I cannot remember what varieties they were, only that one was Spitfire.

It was like love at first sight with them, I took them home and it kind of snowballed from then on.

Everywhere I visited I looked for a garden centre to see if they had any different ones available.

Then I came across Mr Fenwick (the other National Collection Holder), he gave me lots of advice and was able to send me a few corms of plants that I didn't have.

It's due to David Fenwick and Others such as Sarah Wilks of Properplants.com that my collection started to expand.

I must admit though, once you get all the common varieties it gets very difficult to source the more uncommon ones.

I have even turned my attentions to the USA as I have found one or two more there that are not available anywhere else. These include 'Little Redhead' and 'Bright Eyes'.

This year I am going to be dividing some plants for sale. Also I will be collecting seed from certain plants to see what I get as seedlings. It should be a very interesting time for us. If anything exciting happens then you will all be the first to know via Mick.

If anyone would like to see any of these plants then you can email me or visit my website. Just follow these links:

crocosmia@tiscali.co.uk

www.simplesite.com/crocosmia

As you will see when you visit my site, I have ever expanding photograph pages.....

If you need anymore information on any plants please don't hesitate to contact me.