



SABG Newsletter no. 54

November 2025

Newsletter Editor: Richard White richard@sabg.uk

Contents

News.....	1	Meeting at Sheffield Botanical Gardens.....	5
Dates for your diary.....	1	From the Bulletins.....	5
From the Editor.....	1	Bulletin 53/1 – Bulb Buzz.....	5
Notices and Requests.....	1	Bulletin 53/2.....	5
<i>The SABG is 21!</i>	1	Bulletin 53/3 – Newsletter schedule.....	5
<i>Appeal for ideas and help</i>	1	Bulbils.....	6
<i>In the next Newsletter</i>	2	<i>Old web sites</i>	6
SABG meetings.....	2	<i>Boophone disticha</i>	6
<i>The next SABG meeting</i>	2	<i>Lachenalia pygmaea?</i>	7
<i>Report on the Autumn 2025 SABG meeting</i>	2	<i>Digital Library</i>	8
		SABG Committee.....	8

News

- ★ The SABG November Bulb & Seed Exchange is in progress and open for requests for seeds and bulbs. The list was sent to members by email on Monday 3rd November, and is included with printed copies of this newsletter posted to UK members.
- ★ Speakers for the SABG meetings in 2026 have not yet been arranged. Suggestions will be welcomed!

Dates for your diary

- ★ Friday 14th November: Deadline for Jon Evans to receive your November Bulb & Seed Exchange wants list.
- ★ February 2026: Deadline for contributions to Newsletter 55.
- ★ Dates for the SABG meetings in 2026 have not yet been arranged.

From the Editor

You will see later in this newsletter that I have tried to continue with the old practice of my predecessor editors, namely including reports on recent meetings of the SABG. Time will tell whether I can keep this up. Or perhaps I should say “we can keep this up” – there is nothing in the rules which says that other members cannot send me meeting reports for inclusion in the newsletter!

Notices and Requests

The SABG is 21!

With the excitement, anticipation and planning for the visit by Graham Duncan in March this year, no-one on the Committee noticed that the SABG was founded on 4th April 2004, and therefore this year is our 21st anniversary. A Happy Anniversary to all our members!

The original announcement about the formation of the Group appeared on 4th April 2004 in “The African Garden” web site run by David Fenwick. Unfortunately the original site may no longer exist, but thanks to the excellent work by the people at the Internet Archive a preserved copy of the web site can be seen at The African Garden web-site, as explained under “Bulbils” later in this newsletter.

Appeal for ideas and help

As noted in the “Committee changes” section on page 2 of Newsletter no. 52, the SABG Committee is currently reduced in number. We have a replacement for Treasurer (thank you to Rodney Sims for many years service and to Mark Wessels for standing in to fill his place). But we do not currently have a Chairman (thank you to Paul Cumbleton for his period of service, which started with the difficult task of replacing Bill Squire a few years ago).

The rest of the Committee are at present trying to carry on running the Group for the benefit of other members, but have greatly reduced time available to do so. Please

remember that the Committee is not a closed shop, we are not jealously guarding our roles – far from it, we would welcome any offers of ideas and help to improve the group's activities and its interest and usefulness to you. Some suggestions were included in Bulletin 53/3 and discussed at the Autumn meeting, and these ideas will be followed up.

The most urgent tasks that need attention are contacting and engaging speakers for our meetings, and suggesting or helping to carry out other activities which might take place at our meetings or online. For example, "speakers" might also include people willing to give demonstrations or lead discussions. Future meetings might be online or held in other locations.

In the next Newsletter

Following my rather rash plan to adhere to a more regular calendar for issuing newsletters, as mentioned in Bulletin 53/3 (see below), I plan to produce the next Newsletter (no. 55) for distribution in spring 2026. Contributions short or long will be most welcome, with or without pictures. The deadline for contributions to Newsletter 55 will be in February 2026.

SABG meetings

The next SABG meeting

We hope to organise our Spring meeting as soon as possible. In particular, we need one or more speakers (we have received one or two ideas, but need more suggestions).

Report on the Autumn 2025 SABG meeting

The Autumn 2025 meeting was held on 19th October at the Badger Farm Community Centre, Winchester, UK. The meeting began, after the usual chatting and crowding round the plant sales and refreshments tables, with a talk by SABG member Bob Charman, who has made two trips to South Africa recently.

The Western Cape

This was Bob's first visit to South Africa, in September 2024, in a small group of four. The driver Paul Cardy from Greentours was also their guide. He was extremely knowledgeable and was very willing to share his knowledge with the group. The others were two ladies called Ruth and Sue.

Some of Bob's photos reminded me of things I'd seen on my visit to the Western and Northern Cape Provinces in August/September 2017. I've mentioned some of

these occurrences below, using them as an excuse to slip in a few of my own photos taken then. Bob found, as I did, that keeping notes on paper was not easy as plant names were mentioned in quick succession! As a result he was not sure of the identifications of the plants in some of the photos. I have listed many of the species shown by Bob during his talk, and included notes on some of the places he visited, but the plants mentioned were not necessarily seen in the places described – another problem with note-taking, in this case by me!

Fires are frequent in fynbos areas. "Fynbos" refers to areas whose low shrubby vegetation is defined by the presence of three main families of plants: Proteaceae, Ericaceae and Restionaceae (restios). After areas have burnt, many plants appear, such as the spider orchid in one of Bob's photos.

Among the bulbs seen in the photos were an *Albuca* species, *Romulea hirsuta* and *Gladiolus watermeyeri*. Succulents included *Cotyledon orbiculata* and *Lampranthus aureus* growing in desert-like conditions.

A big bird was Ludwig's Bustard (*Neotis ludwigii*), a large, ground-nesting bird that is found almost entirely in the arid west of southern Africa. By chance, I had spotted this same species on my visit, at the newly established Hantam Botanical Garden, which is surrounded by a wild area with walking trails and a number of information signs, including one which depicted the Secretary Bird (on the left in the sign), Ludwig's Bustard (top right) and the Blue Crane (bottom right), which is South Africa's national bird.



Hantam Botanical Gardens [Richard White]

Some of the farms or estates which allow visitors to see their wildflowers also produce coloured leaflets for identification purposes. Sometimes they put on displays with flowers in vases, and Bob photographed some flowers in these instead of "in the wild".



Ludwig's Bustard [Richard White]

Species seen growing in their natural habitat included *Leucospermum cordifolium* (Proteaceae), species of *Nemesia*, *Moraea* (including *M. tricolor*) and *Gazania*. There were also *Gladiolus* species: *G. gueinzii*, *G. quadrangulus* and the reddish *G. speciosus* which is sometimes regarded as a variety of *G. alatus*. There was also a *Pauridia*, (the genus now includes plants formerly known as *Spiloxene*), *Geissorhiza ovata* whose flowers close at night and open at midday, and an orchid which may have been a *Disa* (with multiple flowers on a spike, unlike the well-known *Disa uniflora* found on Table Mountain).

*Pauridia capensis* near Tulbagh [Richard White]

One of the areas Bob visited in his trip was the De Hoop Nature Reserve, to the east of Bredasdorp in the Overberg region, just beyond Cape Agulhas, the southernmost tip of Africa. According to Wikipedia, it is approximately 34,000 hectares in area (340 square kilometres or 130 square miles), and is one of the largest natural areas managed by CapeNature. De Hoop is one of the components of the "Cape Floral Region Protected Areas" UNSECO World Heritage Site. The De Hoop Marine Protected Area extends three nautical miles out to sea from the coastline of the nature reserve.

As well as flowers, Bob kept his eye open for other wildlife, including the Long-tailed Widowbird (*Euplectes progne*) - the males only have their very long tails during the breeding season. I remember once reading about an experiment to determine whether this was due to sexual selection, that is a preference by the females for very long tailed mates. It involved cutting off half the length of some males' tail feathers and gluing them on to the tail feathers of other males. (I can't remember what was concluded, or what the birds thought of it!)

De Hoop is also known for its populations of Cape Mountain Zebra (shown in one of Bob's photos), and Right Whales (visible as dots on the distance, but a photo of the dots was not shown!) At breakfast at De Hoop, birds stole food from the guests, but no photographic evidence of this crime was provided.

Other bulbs illustrated were *Lachenalia unifolia* and another *Lachenalia*, *Ferraria variabilis*, *F. crispa* and *F. uncinata*, *Gladiolus orchidiflorus* (not looking like the illustration in a book), *Oxalis obtusa* and *Babiana ringens* (the "rat's tail" with a stalk for birds to perch on for pollination).

*Ferraria* sp., Worcester West [Richard White]

Plant photographs shown at this point in Bob's talk included *Erica* species (there are more than 200 species in South Africa), *Protea nitida*, an unidentified mesembryanthemum and the orchid *Satyrium coriifolium*.

Another location visited on this trip included the Quiver Tree forest area in Namaqualand, north of Nieuwoudtville in the Northern Cape province, and extending through the Richtersveld into southern Namibia. The southern part of Namaqualand includes the semi-desert Succulent Karoo region, which experiences hot summers, sparse rainfall, and cold winters. Quiver Trees (*Aloidendron dichotomum*) get their name from their use by the San people to make

quivers to hold arrows. A lady was selling souvenirs of them where Bob visited the area.



Quiver Tree (*Aloidendron dichotomum*) [Richard White]

Plants highlighted during this part of the talk included the succulents *Hoodia gordonii* and *Argyrodema delatetii*. A lot of succulents are being harvested and sold to China.

The bulbs *Gladiolus venustus* and *G. liliaceus* were shown, along with *Moraea angusta*, *M. tripetala* and *M. aristata*. The latter is said to be an endangered species in South Africa where it survives only in a small protected area near Cape Town.

Other plants included *Lobelia* and *Drosera*, a *Nemesia* with an unusual flower shape with long extended petals (possibly *Nemesia leipoldtii*), *Codon royenii* (White Nectarcup, a spiny member of the Campanulaceae), a *Gazania* and a plant which might have been the Chinese lantern or Cape gooseberry (*Physalis*), which although from South America is widely cultivated in South Africa.

Animals and birds seen were Bontebok. Jackal, African Dusky Flycatcher, Spotted Eagle Owl (at Kirstenbosch), Cape Weaver-bird, Agama lizard, Cape Penguin (smelly!) and Southern Red Bishop bird.

There was a splendid red-flowered Coral Tree (*Erythrina*) in a garden, a tree which I first encountered in a park in Adelaide many years ago. In the Proteaceae family there were some species of *Leucospermum*, a bottlebrush (*Callistemon*) introduced from Australia, *Protea longifolia* and *P. scabra* which flowers at ground level and is pollinated by small rodents (I've seen one in Australia which does the same – the family Proteaceae is widespread in Australia as well as South Africa.)

An unknown white flower looking like an everlasting and what might be *Arctotis* represented the daisy family Asteraceae. Also represented were a *Kniphofia*, an *Erica*, *Pelargonium carneum* and another *Nemesia*.

Bulbs included *Ornithogalum dubium*, red and yellow forms of *Bulbinella* growing en masse, *Oxalis eckloniana*, a *Lapeirousia*, *Gladiolus tristis* and *Hesperantha vaginata*.



Cape Weaver-bird, Clanwilliam [Richard White]

There were insects too: a long-tongued fly pollinating a tubular flower and what Bob called a Dune Russet butterfly. Despite "Potato News Today" informing me that this is a heat-resistant variety of potato, it looked like a Copper butterfly (*Aloeides* sp.) which I saw at the Ramskop reserve on a hill above Clanwilliam.

There was also a lovely Silver-striped Hawkmoth: a lady who walked past as they admired it said they should kill it because it would eat their clothes!



Copper butterfly (*Aloeides* sp.), Clanwilliam [Richard White]

Bob made a second visit to South Africa in January 2025, and included a few photos from that trip in his talk. Maybe we'll see more of them on a future occasion. They included a *Dierama* and more *Gladiolus* such as *G. flanaganii* which is sometimes called the "suicide lily" – it grows on inaccessible ledges. (I had a pot of this species which despite the fact that the tops of the Drakensbergs can get snow, e.g. at Sani Pass, did not survive the winter outside in Hampshire.)

Talking of the cold, young Zulu sheep farmers have to spend a year to 18 months out on their own looking after their sheep, building their own house and finding their own food – no easy task!

In the last part of Bob's talk we saw a giraffe, Hartebeest (a large antelope), Ground Woodpecker and a Booted Eagle. Some nice butterfly photos included the Yellow Pansy, Zebra Blue and the Table Mountain Beauty, which despite the name is found on mountains all the way from the Western Cape to the Drakensberg, together with a black and white moth, a blue dragonfly and the Red-veined darter dragonfly.

Nerines

After lunch John Sirkett talked about and showed photos of Nerines seen at some recent Nerine events.

The first of these was the 25th Guernsey Nerine Festival, organised by the Guernsey Plant Heritage group and held during October each year. Nerines have a special significance for Guernsey, with the species *Nerine sarniensis* having been named for the island and popularly referred to as the "Guernsey Lily".

How this name came about and how the first plants came to the island is a matter of some debate but theories range from the result of a shipwreck, to introduction by a political prisoner during the Civil War.

Plant Heritage Guernsey rents 500 square metres of an enormous commercial greenhouse to house a large collection – John's photos revealed a sea of Nerines, reminding me of the *Nerine* collection at Exbury. A public display is put on at one end, with the rest of the greenhouse containing the National Collection, in the case of Plant Heritage Guernsey's Nerine group, led by Andrew Lanoe.

Nerines that John showed in his talk included the cultivars "Coral Sea", "Marjorie" and "Lady Foley" (the first of four varieties named after the wives of Lieutenant Governors of Guernsey) and the species *Nerine humilis*, *N. filamentosa* and others.

Returning to Great Britain, many species are not reliably hardy. A form of *N. bowdenii* was shown making a good show at Wisley about five years after planting. John finished his talk with the *Nerine* display in the Five Arrows Gallery at Exbury, where he mentioned there are some varieties cryptically named after prominent politicians such as Boris Johnson (my notes are illegible at this point, which is probably just as well).

Some questions followed about the cultivation of Nerines, with answers including the suggestion that "now" (mid-October) is a good time to start feeding them.

Finally the meeting included a discussion of ways in which the SABG might both increase its usefulness to members and attract more members, especially younger ones and those who can help us do more things.

Meeting at Sheffield Botanical Gardens

Graham Duncan visited the UK again in October 2025, during which his main purpose was to photograph Nerines in cultivation. Following an invitation by member Peter Kohn, Graham gave a talk entitled "*Kirstenbosch, the most beautiful garden in Africa, and its collection of South African bulbs*", in the Dorothy Fox Education Centre in Sheffield Botanical Gardens on October 14th, attended by about 100 people. This was not officially an SABG meeting, but rather was hosted by the Friends of the Botanical Gardens, Sheffield, of which Peter is currently Acting Chair. Thanks are due to Peter for organising this event!

From the Bulletins

The following items which appeared in the emailed Bulletins 53/1, 53/2 and 53/3 are included here as a more permanent record and in case they are of interest to members who do not receive emails.

Bulletin 53/1 – Bulb Buzz

This mostly contained notices of events which have already taken place, but Mark Wessels pointed out a web link¹ which will take you to "[Bulb Buzz](https://botanicalsociety.org.za/bulb-buzz/) uncovering South Africa's hidden treasures: from conservation to cultivation!". This was a "webinar" (a Zoom-type online discussion seminar) organised by the Botanical Society of South Africa "where the likes of John Manning discuss recent new discoveries and others talk about the cultivation of predominantly Iridaceae spp".

The link will take you to a page which displays a notice about the Webinar which took place on 29th May. But

1 <https://botanicalsociety.org.za/bulb-buzz/>

don't worry that you've missed it, just scroll down and you'll see the same poster again but with a YouTube-style red arrow in the middle to play the video, or you can click a link to "Watch on YouTube". You'll need a spare hour or so!

Bulletin 53/2

This contained announcements for the November Bulb & Seed Exchange (the deadline for requests is Friday 14th November) and the recent SABG Autumn meeting.

Bulletin 53/3 – Newsletter schedule

As well as reminders such as those mentioned above, this Bulletin also contained some thoughts on ways the activities of the SABG could be enhanced, which were discussed further at the Autumn meeting reported above. The ideas and suggestions now need to be digested and considered further by the existing Committee members. We will report back to members, perhaps in Bulletin 54/1, and seek further assistance.

Also, your Newsletter Editor observed that "you may have noticed the recent rarity of our Newsletters, the last one being over five months ago at the end of April 2025. However, although not yet quite an Endangered Species, they do need a conservation strategy. In particular, they need attention to their sources of food and energy! In their food-chain, they need to be fed information, and in their turn will hopefully be consumed by members."

I am going to try to have **regular newsletter publication dates**, partly to fit in with the dates on which exchange timetables are announced and exchange lists are published, partly so that I can block out suitable dates in my diary to make sure I actually get down to editing the newsletter, and partly so that you will know when I am hoping to receive items to include on a timely basis. If I don't receive items to include, the newsletter will be short and consist mainly of reminders and badgering you all to contribute something (you have been warned!)

My tentative plan is for **three or four issues per year**, on a fairly predictable timetable as follows:

Issue date	to include	contributions by
February/ March	details of Spring meeting	February
May/June	(if available material permits)	May
mid August	Summer exchange list, details of Autumn meeting	early August
early November	November exchange list	end of October

SABG members should remember that announcements will usually appear on the web site and in Bulletins before they appear in the Newsletter.

Bulbils

Old web sites

I noticed our 21st anniversary mentioned earlier when I was tidying up an area of our web site. As you can imagine, web sites naturally accumulate cobwebs, dead spiders and broken links. One of the latter was the link to "**The African Garden**", a web site run by David Fenwick. This was the location for an announcement of the original establishment of the SABG, described on [an information page on our web site](#)².

"The African Garden" no longer exists at its original location, but thanks to the excellent work done by [Archive.org](#)³ a preserved copy of the web site can be read online. This footnote⁴ links to [the latest](#) of a number of separately archived copies of the web-site, last edited in around 2015. If you find it interesting, please make a small donation to Archive.org to help them continue their work, a project they call the "Wayback Machine", saving old web sites from vanishing forever when no longer looked after by their original owners. Maybe one day that will happen to our web site!

Indeed, at the time of writing the old **sabg.tk** site was "Saved 85 times between April 11, 2009 and January 15, 2025" and our current **sabg.uk** version has been "Saved 56 times between July 1, 2022 and August 9, 2025". Immortality at last!

Boophone disticha

In 2008 or 2009 I obtained a growing bulb of *Boophone disticha* from a member of the Alpine Garden Society in Crawley. The bulb has been growing well since that time, and has been flowering for many years. This year, for the first time, two flowering stems appeared. An internet search for *Boophone disticha* showed photos with only one flower. I wonder whether more than one is common or unusual?

I inferred from the original label when I acquired the plant that it came as seed from Silverhill, was sown in March 2005 and potted on in June 2008.

2 <https://sabg.uk/info:announcement>

3 <https://web.archive.org>

4 <https://web.archive.org/web/20170104064249/http://www.theafricangarden.com/>



Boophone disticha, Jeff Layman

As the supplier was Silverhill, I would hope that the seeds were correctly named. Here is a photo of the plant in its 19 cm long tom, but the second flower's colour (a true pink) is a bit washed out in the bright sunshine. Unfortunately, moving the plant to photograph it resulted in the fruiting stem collapsing somewhat! The scent of the flower is incredibly strong even though it is only half open – it not only scents the whole room it is in, but if the door is left open it can be detected in the hall as well.

Jeff Layman

Jeff's plant has clearly produced one flower spike, which has faded and is producing seed pods in the photo, followed by a second spike later, where the flowers are just opening. Searching online, I found a photo in the [Dave's Garden](https://davesgarden.com/guides/pf/showimage/452272) web-site⁵ which also shows two flower spikes arising from one bulb, but in this case the two spikes are developing simultaneously. In either case, we wonder whether the production of two spikes is a prelude to the bulb splitting into two. (The image shown on the Dave's Garden web-page is cropped so that the bulb isn't visible, but by [viewing the image separately](https://davesgarden.com/pics/2019/06/16/Kell/205ace.jpg)⁶ the top of the bulb can be seen.)

5 <https://davesgarden.com/guides/pf/showimage/452272>

6 <https://davesgarden.com/pics/2019/06/16/Kell/205ace.jpg>

Lachenalia pygmaea?

In November 2023 David Lloyd sent me and a couple of other members an email with some photos of a mystery plant, which generated some responses. Unfortunately I then forgot about these, but recently I rediscovered the correspondence while looking for photos for this newsletter.

David originally wrote: "To my surprise this dinky little plant has flowered among a small group of *Lachenalia reflexa* that came from Terry Smale's collection. The pot was at the back of the staging hidden behind some *L. pallida* and *L. viridiflora* that are doing well. I only noticed it the other night when I was in the greenhouse with a torch searching for molluscs! Do you have any idea of what it might be? I'm intrigued now and I would like to find a friend for it."



David Lloyd

Jon Evans replied: "An interesting little find. It certainly has a resemblance to some of the *Lachenalia*, particularly the former *Polyxenas*, perhaps *L. pygmaea*."

Paul Cumbleton said: "Sadly the flowers have gone over too much to see any detail. Perhaps next year you would be able to get pictures of fresh flowers. Any scent may also help a bit with identification so this would be worth remembering to sniff next season", to which David replied "Looking at pics in Duncan it might be *L. pygmaea*. The flowers do have a scent though. I'll have a closer look next year."

My own response was to try Google's image search, also known as Google Lens, but that thinks it's a hyacinth – I think I can see why!

Digital Library

In the Archive.org Wayback Machine mentioned above, I discovered [Grow Bulbs](#)⁷ by Graham Duncan, 2000 (this is the 64-page booklet, not the much thicker 390-page book). I suspect there may be many more such gems to uncover, but for every one the copyright position will need to be checked.

Carl Garnham alerted me two years ago to a couple of papers at the Academia.edu website on some *Ornithogalum* and the related genus *Nicipe* (which I hadn't heard of previously). I've just added them to our [Digital Library](#)⁸, and mention them here belatedly. You appear to have to sign up to download them, but scroll down and you will see what I think is the whole text:

- [A revision of Ornithogalum subgenus Aspasia section Aspasia, the chinchinchees \(Hyacinthaceae\)](#)⁹
- [Nicipe rosulata \(Ornithogaloideae, Hyacinthaceae\), a New Species from the Little Karoo in South Africa, with a New Combination in the Genus](#)¹⁰

SABG Committee

Chairman

(post vacant)

Bulb & seed exchange

Jonathan Evans jon@sabg.uk

Treasurer

Mark Wessels mark@sabg.uk

Secretary & Membership

Alina Hughes abmhughes@gmail.com

Newsletter & Web editor

Richard White richard@sabg.uk



Romulea komsbergensis and admirers, near Middelpos [Richard White]

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7 <https://archive.org/details/growbulbs00unse>

8 <https://sabg.uk/library:start>

9 <https://www.academia.edu/74155451/>

10 <https://www.academia.edu/100148485/>