



Southern African Bulb Group

www.sabg.tk

SABG Newsletter no. 33 August 2016

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News

★ Urgent: The annual Bulb & Seed Exchange exercise for 2016 is under way, thanks again to the enthusiasm of our Chairman Bill Squire. If you have some spare seeds or bulbs to contribute, please see the item in the **Notices and Requests** section below. The full list of bulbs and seeds which become available will be emailed when it becomes available.

★ Alice Vanden Bon has resigned from the SABG Committee because of her considerable other activities, including Technical Editor of the BCSS journal. Her work for the Committee and help with the Bulb & Seed Exchange was much appreciated. Volunteers to join the Committee, or to help in other ways, will be most welcome – no qualifications or experience necessary! Speak to a Committee member at the next meeting, or send us an email.

★ We still plan to circulate a membership list – see the item in the **Notices and Requests** section below.

Dates for your diary

- ★ 1st October to 6th November 2016: Nerine display in the Five Arrows Gallery, Exbury Gardens, Hampshire
- ★ Saturday 15th October 2016: NAAS/SABG visit to the *Nerine* display and glasshouse tour at Exbury
- ★ Sunday 23rd October 2016: SABG Autumn Meeting, Winchester
- ★ Sunday 2nd April 2017: SABG Spring Meeting, Winchester

From the Editor

Once again, please accept my apologies for this Newsletter being much later than I had planned. I intend to send out further information in September, including the Bulb and Seed Exchange list and a separate membership list.

This Newsletter has a focus on South African bulbous plants growing outdoors and, hopefully, proving to be reasonably hardy. But please don't take this as a

cultural recommendation, even though as I write this it's a distinctly warm 25C outside. Most of our plants, especially the winter growers, will still need to be kept a lot warmer and drier than the usual conditions outside in a British winter! (There is also a rather timely Olympic reference on a later page.)

As mentioned before, I'm always on the look-out for, and grateful to receive, any information, snippets, notices and articles, so please keep sending them to me. The more I receive, the more likely I am to produce the next Newsletter promptly! This is your Newsletter, so the best way to make sure it contains the sort of things you want to read, is to send me your thoughts. Ideally, short articles with some photos will be ideal, but I will happily receive any items of news or comments, especially photos of plants of interest, with any rough notes about them which I can try to polish up.

Notices and Requests

Bulb and Seed Exchange

The Southern African Bulb Group is running its annual Bulb and Seed Exchange again this year. Bill Squire, our Chairman and the organiser of the Exchange, will again be in South Africa during part of the period during which we run the Exchange. However, as usual he will be doing most of the work before he leaves and after he returns. I am assisting him by sending out this information and the list of seeds and bulbs available, when it is ready.

Thanks to Bill's hard work, this Exchange has developed into a most successful and anticipated part of our activities, so we are hoping for at least as many of you as before, if not more, to provide your spare bulb or seed material for the benefit of other members! Please note that although we call it an exchange, you will still be able to request seeds or bulbs from the list in exchange for a suitable donation to cover at least postage and packing and a little bit extra for the SABG funds, if you don't yourself have material to offer.

We will probably only be able to accept material from and send material to members in the U.K and the European Union, because of import/export complications in dealing with other countries.

The timetable this year is as follows. Note that because of the late distribution of this Newsletter, the procedures and dates below differ from those I distributed a few days ago by email, to allow those of you who receive your newsletters by post to take part and to allow me to add late offers to the list prepared by Bill after he has left and before I distribute the complete

list of what is available.

- If you haven't already communicated with Bill, please **email or post a list of what you have** or expect to have available (not the bulbs or seeds themselves) to me (Richard White) to arrive by **Friday 2nd September**, and I will add the names to the Bulb and Seed Exchange list before sending it out to members. Please include any supporting information such as source, place of origin or variety name, if available. My email address is at the beginning and end of this newsletter and my postal address, if you don't have email, is 1 Cottage Mews, Fordingbridge, Hampshire SP6 1RJ.
- As soon as you have the bulbs or seeds available, please **post them**, suitably labelled so they can be matched to the list you supplied, to Bill Squire, 8 Benmoor Rd, Creekmoor, Poole, Dorset, BH17 7DS, to arrive by **mid September**, so that they are waiting for him when he returns to the UK.
- Bill and I will prepare the Bulb and Seed Exchange list of available material which I will email out to members in early September. This will include some information about making a donation, if you are not a supplier of material. Should you require a list to be sent to you by post, please send me (not Bill) a self-addressed envelope suitable for two or three folded sheets of A4 paper, with the correct postage attached.
- After you have received the Bulb and Seed Exchange list of available material, please send any requests to Bill, to arrive by **mid September**. He will then start the despatch process. Please be patient as this is a lot of work!
- Then it's up to you to grow the plants and enjoy them!

I hope you find this exercise interesting and perhaps obtain some new plants. Of course, its success depends on the generous efforts of the donors, so please check whether you have some spares you can donate. By the way, do not worry or be offended if Bill does not acknowledge your submitted bulbs and seeds or your requests, as he will be away, and very busy sorting things out on his return. You will see your material listed in due course.

Membership list

As mentioned in the previous newsletter, we shall soon circulate a list of SABG members, probably at the same time as the Bulb and Seed Exchange list. This will, amongst other things, enable members to locate others nearby and perhaps instigate SABG-related activities in

their area.

If any of your contact details (name, address, email, phone number) have changed and you haven't already let us know, please email me (Richard White, address at the end of this Newsletter).

This list will only be sent to current SABG members, and will not be put on the Web, except possibly in a future restricted members-only area. All members' names and the first part of their postcodes will be included (e.g. SP6, or their country if not in the UK), together with phone numbers and email addresses where available. It will not include full postal addresses, for security reasons – you will have to contact the member directly if you wish to meet them (other than at SABG meetings, of course!) If you do not wish to be contacted either by phone or email or both, please let me know as soon as possible and I will exclude these details from the list, although this will reduce its value to other members.

Future SABG meetings

The next SABG meeting

Our next meeting will be held on **Sunday 23rd October 2016** at our normal venue, the Badger Farm Community Centre near Winchester. Directions are shown on our web-site at www.sabg.tk. 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 **Nick Wray**, the curator of Bristol University Botanic Garden¹. Nick has recently been awarded the RHS Associate of Honour² which “recognises his work of more than 30 years at the garden and for his role in creating the new Botanic Garden at The Holmes, which was the first new university botanic garden to be moved and redeveloped in the UK for nearly 40 years”.

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

1 <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/botanic-garden/>

2 <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/news/2016/february/rhs-nick-wray.html>

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 12.30 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 have the opportunity to chat to others. 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 at the door. If you remember to add your car registration number to the list, there is no charge for parking.

SABG Spring 2017 meeting

The Spring meeting will be on **Sunday 2nd April 2017**, also at the Badger Farm Community Centre, when our very own Bob Charman will give a talk on his trip to Patagonia.

RHS Wisley South African meadow

I came across this new meadow at the Royal Horticultural Society garden at Wisley, Surrey quite by chance. I had been looking at the orchids, cacti and succulents in the new large Glasshouse and noticed that a fairly inconspicuous door on the opposite side to the main entrance was open. I think this door has been kept closed on my previous visits, which have often been during January or February when butterflies are on view in the tropical section and the weather outside is cold.

But on Wednesday 10th August 2016 the door to the “secret garden” was open, and I followed some paths through the North American prairie plantings around the “far side” of the lake where I have never previously wandered. They led me to a crescent-shaped area with a variety of bulbs and other perennials in flower in a wild meadow environment. Gradually it dawned on me that the plants were all South African, including *Kniphofia*, *Watsonia*, *Gladiolus* and *Galtonia*. The geographical focus was confirmed by a notice at one end of the plot.

It turns out that Professor James Hitchmough of Sheffield University, who designed the floral features in the London 2012 Olympic Park, had created a South African meadow in the RHS garden at Wisley. The meadow is said to have been inspired by his “World Gardens” at the Olympic Park at Stratford. The South

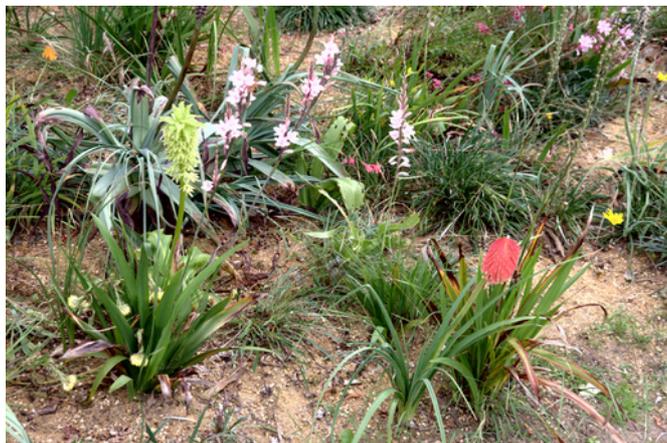


African meadow was initiated in 2013, and lies beyond the Alpine House and the Glasshouse borders, close to the children’s play area. It’s marked at the top of the map on the 2016 Garden Map leaflet³.

The picture above is of the notice in the meadow. There are many bulbs in the meadow, and *Eucomis*, *Crocsmia*, *Gladiolus* and *Nerine* are listed on the notice, but none are illustrated on it.



Note that these plants having been growing outside for several winters, albeit not especially severe ones.



Galtonia (Ornithogalum) candicans

Further web pages describing the South African Meadow can be found in a footnote below⁴.

4 Some more mentions of the South African meadow at RHS Wisley:
 (i) <http://www.diyretailer.co.uk/news/item/325-james-hitchmoughs-south-african-style-comes-to-rhs-garden>
 (ii) <http://blog.theenduringgardener.com/category/places-to-visit/>
 (iii) There is one picture of the meadow at <https://rhsgcafellowsip.wordpress.com/2015/10/18/wandering-through-the-wild-garden-and-bedding-with-formal/>

3 <https://www.rhs.org.uk/gardens/pdf/wisley/RHS-garden-wisley-map-2016>



Gladiolus sp.

Suggestions as to the names of the species growing in the South African meadow and illustrated on this page will be welcomed!



Watsonia sp.



Watsonia sp.

Growing bulbs in the lawn

(It's a year since I received this article, but this is a good place to include it because of its relationship to the RHS South African meadow described above. I only have space for some of the photos in the Newsletter, but I will put them all on the web-site in due course.)

John Davies, a member who lives in Sutton Coldfield, Birmingham, sent the following article and photos to Audrey Cain. Thanks to you both!

I have two gardens, a small front south-facing garden where I have always tried to grow the sun-loving less hardy plants and the larger rear north-facing quite moist garden in which I didn't really expect to be able to grow very much apart from shade loving plants and those bulbs that come before the trees.

Initially I didn't want a lawn at all in the rear garden, but my wife did. So rather than get someone else to lay

the lawn for me I decided to lay it myself and plant some bulbs under it as I went. I ordered the bulbs and the turf to arrive together and waited for them to arrive. It rained heavily for two weeks and the 25 tons of top soil I had levelled out to take the lawn became a quagmire! I really wanted to share my plans with my wife, but she would have made me promise not to do it, as she likes a good old-fashioned lawn!

At last everything arrived and I deviously scattered 1000 *Fritillaria meleagris*, 500 of each of three types of *Crocus*, *Scilla sibirica*, *Chionodoxa luciliae* and pink and blue *Scilla bifolia* over the bare soil, then laid the turf over them. You could hardly see the soil for bulbs!

That was in December 2010 and I did it that way because I couldn't face the idea of planting thousands of bulbs by hand. I didn't tell my wife but in the spring I couldn't really deny it. I did try to blame it on the birds or the squirrels but after a couple of months the evidence was overwhelmingly against that possibility, unless an army of squirrels had chosen to invade our garden, so I had to come clean and own up.

Since then I have added many different species, *Hermodactylus* [formerly *Iris tuberosa*], *Anemone blanda* and *A. pavonina*, *Dodecatheon*, *Pasithea caerulea*, *Ipheion* [which some now call *Tristagma*], *Cyclamen*, *Narcissus*, *Tulipa*, *Triteleia*, *Dichelostemma*, *Sparaxis*, *Homeria*, *Ixia*, *Tigridia*, *Moraea*, *Muscari*, *Fritillaria*, *Erythronium*, *Ornithogalum*, *Camassia*, *Tecophilaea*, *Olsynium* [*Sisyrinchium*], *Gladiolus*, *Romulea*, *Lapeirousia* and *Iris*.



Bulbs about to be planted in October 2014

My wife hates it! The thing she really hated is that by June the grass has grown so long it looks a mess, so I have acquired a grass herbicide to control the more rampant grasses. This is the first year and the results are encouraging, but I think it needs at least two treatments and I only gave it one. In August 2014 I decided to burn off the top growth with a blow torch:



I usually scatter the bulbs in drifts and plant them by lifting the turf with a flat crowbar. Sometimes I disturb previous plantings but it doesn't seem to affect flowering, and there is continuous interest from January to July. In August it gets cut but then things start to emerge again in September.



After burning in August 2014

The results are difficult to be sure of and may be due to other factors but it would appear that this burning has been beneficial to the flowering of a great many species, particularly *Ixia*, *Narcissus*, *Bulbocodium*,

Homeria, *Hermodactylus* and *Ipheion*, to name a few. I have also noticed a great improvement in the height and flower size of *Triteleia ixioides* ‘Splendens’.



The coming season [2016] will be the maker or breaker of the whole project, and may well prove to be the last time I attempt to add to the flowering display of this garden.



I have tried the *Ixia* cultivars along with *I. viridiflora*, *Homeria* etc. in the front South-facing garden with



limited success, compared with the bulb meadow and think this is due possibly to the fact that the front dries up much more quickly than the rear due to the grass covering in the rear, and the lack of sun in winter means far less of a freeze/thaw is experienced in the rear. Also the grass when growing probably soaks up a lot of excess water, the roots and the top growth of the grass help to protect the bulbs in winter, the fibrous live and dead roots of the grass help to provide a suitable soil structure, plus the tunnels any insects and worms make, etc., etc.



I do still worry when planting, but strangely seem to spear only a few bulbs when doing a new planting. I doubt if I will be so lucky this year as there are a lot to go in. I console myself with the thought that at least if I do kill something in the process I will be replacing it with something better or at least as good. It is difficult to keep a balance between early flowering subjects and early emerging subjects that flower later but could conceal or crowd out the early beauties. This seems to be something that has to be built up slowly over time and cannot be rushed, although I suppose it wouldn't be impossible to replicate if all the species were available.



Snippets

Moraea huttonii

Visiting the Sir Harold Hillier Garden at Ampfield near Romsey, Hampshire, on the 27th May last summer (2015), I noticed a large patch of what looked like tall yellow irises in the gravel beds between Jermyn's House and the Magnolia garden. On closer inspection they still looked like tall yellow irises, in fact the flowers looked very much like our own native Yellow Flag iris (*Iris pseudacorus*) but a label announced that they were *Moraea huttonii*.



On a later visit on 8th August 2015, the *Moraea* plants had ripe seed-pods bursting open, and on inspection some seeds accidentally fell into a bag that I happened to have in my hand, so I will report later if I am able to germinate and grow them.

According to some web sites, it comes from the temperate Drakensberg mountains of South Africa and

Lesotho, and is sold in the UK as hardy. It may be that this plant is well known to many of you, and that I had previously overlooked it because of its resemblance to *Iris pseudacorus*.

In the next Newsletter

I plan to produce the next Newsletter (no. 34) for distribution during September, before our Autumn meeting on 23rd October 2016.

- Reports on the October 2015 and April 2016 meetings
- Report on progress with the SABG web-site

I will also be distributing, possibly separately from the Newsletter:

- Bulb and Seed Exchange list
- Membership list (see Notices and Requests in this issue)

What else the Newsletter contains depends on you! Ideas, notes, photos and or even articles for our newsletter are always welcome. You don't have to prepare them in any special way, and needn't spend ages refining them, I will happily edit them for the newsletter. Just send me an email (my address is at both ends of the Newsletter!)

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