Fall , 2016

The Bulb Garden

~Gardening with Bulbs ~

Volume 14, Issue 4

What's Inside...

Three Weeks in South Africa

Michael Mace

Mike Mace lives in San Jose, California and is a long-time member of PBS and an occasional contributor with a fascination for soils and climate and their interaction with the plants he grows and wants to grow. He had the great pleasure of seeking bulb nirvana in South Africa along with his wife Bonnie, who enjoyed the trip from a different perspective. All photos were taken by Michael on his trip.

Three weeks in South Africa! It sounds like heaven for a bulb enthusiast, and okay, that's what it was. In September 2016 my wife and I took our first trip to South Africa, looking for plants (for me) and animals (for her). A very wise PBS member once told me that you have to travel to a place to really understand its ecology and growing conditions. I think she was right. Although I had read about South Africa and grown its plants for decades, I now understand it all a lot better. In this article I'll share what I learned.

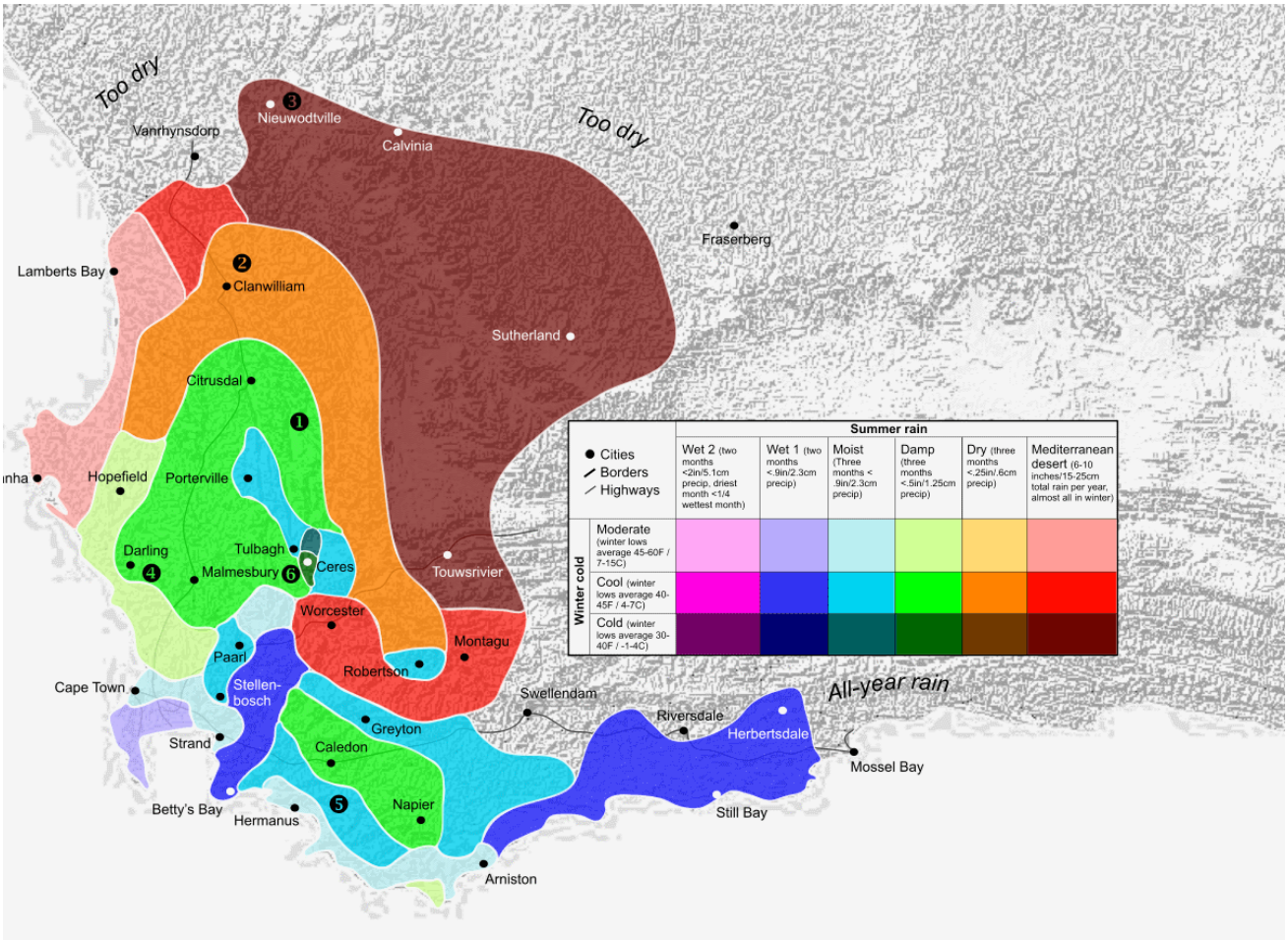
The highlights

If you're thinking about going, here's my summary: friendly people, beautiful scenery, very clean, safe if you're careful, and crazy drivers. It's also dirt cheap at the moment because the Rand is so low. Despite the long plane flight, this trip was much cheaper for us Californians than going to someplace like Australia or Europe.

The soil is very distinct. Much of the area we visited (in the Western Cape province) is basically sand with some organic material mixed in. Even the

Bonnie Mace surrounded by bulbs.

Three Weeks in South Africa (cont'd)



Area covered by the Maces' trip to South Africa. Map courtesy of Mike Mace. Available at http://www.pacificbulbsociety.org/pbswiki/index.php/MediterraneanMaps

supposedly clay areas are more like river silt (meaning they are much more porous than what I'm used to in California). In spring, parts of the country seem like a giant sponge, with water oozing out all over the place.

There are bulbs everywhere, but the rare ones are hard to find. A handful of bulbs seem to show up everywhere: *Albucas*, one or two *Moraea* (formerly *Homeria*) species, a couple of *Oxalis*, and *Lapeirousia*. You can't avoid seeing them in spring. But many others are incredibly hard to find—unless you know the exact right place and time, you will miss them completely. So a guide or other inside information can be helpful. I'll explain more below.

The details

We rented an SUV and drove from place to place, guided by a lot of advice ahead of time from PBS members and others. We planned the trip far in advance, reserving self-catering cottages along the route.

Come along with us on the drive. I'll pause and describe the spots where we found a lot of bulbs.

Gladiolus* (possibly) *hirsutus

Stop #1: North of Ceres along R303. We flew into Cape Town, picked up our rental car, and headed north the following morning. After passing through some beautiful mountain passes that rival the nicest scenery of the American West, we came to an agricultural town called Ceres. The R303 is a two-lane road that heads north of Ceres along a valley. There are farms in the flat areas and Fynbos on the hills and mountains. (If you don't know Fynbos, it's a distinct shrub community that grows in sandy soil. Many of the pretty flowering bushes from South Africa grow here: *Proteas*, *Ericas*, etc. There are some bulbs

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as well.)

The valley gradually narrows as you go north from Ceres, climbing over a low pass and bringing the road up against the base of the mountains. There are some stone fruit and citrus farms in the area, and small roads that lead off to the west and east to go who-knows-where in the mountains. In one area the Fynbos had burned recently, exposing a sandy slope spotted with rocks and bulbs. We stopped to look around.

There was water everywhere: little rivulets popping out of the hillside, and small swampy puddles where the ground flattened. The bulbs included small yellow *Spiloxene*, a beautiful pastel pink and blue *Gladiolus* (I think *G. hirsutus*), a couple of *Oxalis*, and two cheerful *Romulea* species. Plus of course some big golden South African daisies, which seem to be everywhere in spring. Some plants were only in the swampy areas, while others were in the better-drained spots. We took pictures of everything and then got back on the road.

Lapeirousia jacquinii

Driving further north, the valley narrows down to a point, and the road turns to dirt and climbs over a pass. To an American, a dirt road is a sign that you are about to leave civilization. You'd be reluctant to drive it unless you had survival supplies and maybe a firearm or two. In South Africa, though, the people seem to love their dirt roads. Some roads are numbered and easy to find on any map. They're usually well maintained and drivable with a normal car.

We drove up to the top of the pass and got out of the car to look at the scenery. There we met our first baboon, sauntering out of the bushes. We'd been warned about them jumping into cars and stealing food, so we hustled back into the car and closed the windows. We stared at the baboon for a while, and it stared at us.

Stop #2: Clanwilliam. About 100 miles (175 km) north of Ceres, Clanwilliam is at the edge of the Cederberg Mountains, a very dramatic range that's a haven for hikers and rock climbers. Clanwilliam has the only supermarket in the area, and the main street was almost swarming with people. It was very different from the typical small town in California, where downtown is often an empty shell as people go to the big box stores on the outskirts.

Cyanella orchidiformis

We planned a two-day visit here to see the Clanwilliam Wildflower Show. It was promoted on the Internet, and for some reason we thought it would be like a county fair, with booths and activities all over town. As it turns out, the festival was basically a flower exhibit in an old church. Don't get me wrong, it was an incredibly nice exhibit: volunteers had created displays with thousands of hand-picked flowers from various vegetation types. It must have been an immense amount of work. But we saw it all in about half an hour, and then we had the rest of the two days to ourselves.

Fortunately, there's a local wildflower reserve on a hill above town: Ramskop. That was an unexpected gem, with lots of flowers and scenic views of the lake behind Clanwilliam Dam. Bulbs included the small purple *Lapeirousia jacquinii, Cyanella orchidiformis, Albuca canadensis, Chasmanthe floribunda*, a tall red *Watsonia* species, and oodles of daisies.

We stayed in a converted farmhouse east of Clanwilliam, at the edge of the Karoo desert. There had been a heat wave the week before, and many of the annuals had finished blooming. But we spotted small *Lapeirousias* and a yellow *Oxalis* in the sandy soil. Plus some leopard tracks, but unfortunately no leopard.

Stop #3: Nieuwoudtville. A half-day's drive north of Clanwilliam, Nieuwoudtville bills itself as the bulb capital of the world. The area is borderline desert, a farming and sheep-raising district on an enormous plateau 2,300 feet (700m) above sea level. Two big reserves provide space for bulbs near the town, and you can also see bulbs along some of the roads.

We came up from the south via another dirt highway, the R364. It's a pleasant drive through wide open scrub desert, with scattered ranches and basically nothing else but mountains and interesting plants like *Euphorbias*. The road culminates in a pass that climbs quickly up to the plateau. Called Botterkloof (roughly Butter Gap in

Three Weeks in South Africa (cont'd)

English), the pass is basically a narrow dirt road carved into the side of a steep ravine, with no guard rail and just enough room to pass if you meet an oncoming car. It doesn't look bad from the bottom, but

on the way up the road turns a little and gets steeper, then turns again and gets steeper still. The car becomes quiet, you steer very carefully, and your wife says "I don't like this."

Fortunately for us, the weather was dry. Because of the steepness and lack of a guard rail, I would never drive Botterkloof Pass in the rain.

There are many other delightfully (or disturbingly) narrow mountain passes in South Africa. If you're interested, there's a wonderful website with maps, descriptions, and videos: http://www.mountainpassessouthafrica.co.za/. It's a great site for armchair tourists.

Once we were up on the plateau, we started to see bulbs along the road (along with several tortoises). Most of the bulbs were *Albuca* and a single orange species of *Moraea* (one of the former *Homerias*). They were blooming in huge masses at some points. We also saw the broad flat leaves of some Amaryllid species.

Coming into Nieuwoudtville, we stopped at the Hantam Botanical Garden, a former farm and private flower reserve. We were there on a Sunday, when the

Above left: *Romulea sabulosa*. Right: *Hesperantha cucullata*. Left: Botterkloof Pass.

garden was open but the visitor center was closed. As a result we didn't really know where to look, and I think we may have missed the best bulbs.

If you visit Hantam, be aware that it's not a conventional garden with well-marked paths and exhibits. It's a sprawling property that reaches well beyond the horizon, much of it minimally marked. The area around the visitor center is former farm fields that have been given back to nature. The fields were awash with colorful daisies and other annuals, along with scattered bulbs. We saw a *Lachenalia* (probably *L. elegans* v. *suavolens*), an Ixia (perhaps *I. rapunculoides*), and a field full of orange *Moraea* (*Homeria*) *miniata*. But the most interesting bulbs were in some raised beds near the visitor center, where we saw *Romulea sabulosa, Moraea tripetala, Hesperantha cucullata, Sparaxis elegans* and *S. pillansii*, a yellow *Bulbinella*, a *Babiana*, an *Oxalis*, and one very tired *Hesperantha vaginata*.

The raised beds were of interesting construction. Most were rectangles outlined by concrete blocks, but

Three Weeks in South Africa (cont'd)

there were also huge old tractor tires laid on their sides and filled with soil. They made wonderful circular beds. If anyone has any old tractor tires to spare, let me know.

On a personal note, the raised beds at Hantam made me feel better about my own bulb-growing efforts. I thought my raised beds were kind of ragged and informal, but they'd be right at home in the botanic garden.

We spent most of our time wandering the farm fields along with the rest of the visitors, drawn by the beautiful annuals. What I didn't realize was that formerly ploughed fields rarely have their original complement of bulbs. For that, you need undisturbed land. A scrubby gray area we saw in the distance, beyond the fields, was Renosterveld, the preferred habitat for many bulbs. We walked to the edge of it, but probably should have spent most of our time exploring it carefully rather than walking in the fields. Unfortunately, the signage didn't make that clear, and the online map of the garden is close to useless. This is one place where a local guide would have been helpful.

Top left: Dolerite Renosterveld. Right: An example of Koppies (stony volcanic hills). Bottom left: Tillite Renosterveld soil.

I should explain about Renosterveld versus Fynbos. (*Ed: Renosterveld and Fynbos are floristic provinces; the name also refers to types of soils and vegetation.*)

Many of the large mountain ranges in the western cape are sandstone, often very hard quartz that weathers into white sand (and creates beautiful white beaches). The soils it makes are acidic and very low in nutrients.

Originally, the sandstone was overlain by a layer of Renosterveld and Fynbos are floristic provinces; the name also refers to types of soils and vegetation.
shale and mudstone. It's softer than the sandstone, so as the mountains grew up, the shale eroded and washed down into the valleys. It's much finer-grained than the sand, and is relatively high in nutrients, making it good for farming. The locals call it clay soil, but to me it's more like silt. (The difference, in my opinion: clay soil in California is aggressively sticky goop that dries rock hard in summer and clings to your shoes in winter. The silty soil I saw in South Africa drains slowly, but doesn't turn into muck like the stuff in my backyard. I'm sure they have gluey soil in some parts of South Africa, but that wasn't what I saw in the reserves.)

So in general, the Western Cape landscape consists of rugged mountains with sandy slopes, a transition zone at the base, and then fine-grained soil in most of the flat valley floors. The silty bottomlands, when they have not been converted into farm fields or grazing land, grow a vegetation called Renosterveld, which consists mostly of grasses and dull colored bushes. It's also home to a very wide variety of bulbs.

Other than Hantam, the other preserved area near town is the Nieuwoudtville Wild Flower Reserve, run by the local municipality. Although this reserve is smaller and less organized than Hantam, I liked it better because I understood what I was looking at. There is an online report by Simon Todd http://www.indigo-dc.org/documents/Vegetation%20of%20Nville%20Wildflower%20Reserve.pdf mapping the soil and vegetation in the reserve, and using that we were able to go straight to the best spots for bulbs, and to understand what we were looking at.

The reserve includes Koppies (stony volcanic hills) and two types of Renosterveld soil: Dolerite Renosterveld

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and Tillite Renosterveld. Each has its own typical plants. Within each soil type, some areas have been ploughed in the past, while other bits are totally undisturbed. The undisturbed areas are small and scattered, but they have the greatest variety of plants.

Dolerite Renosterveld was eroded from the volcanic rocks that make up the Koppies. It's described by Todd as "spongy clay slopes and flats," and sure enough

Above: *Romulea eximia*. Center top: *Moraea gawleri*. Right center: *Gladiolus alatus*. Far right: *Wurmbea marginata*. Below: Monkey Beetle.

the soil there did feel weirdly spongy when I walked on it. It's red, and to an American it looks a bit like a baseball infield. It's very fine-grained, as you can see in the photo.

The Tillite Renosterveld was eroded from that layer of shale I mentioned above. It's not as spongy as the Dolerite soil. In this location it was yellowish, and very fine-grained and silty.

In the reserve we saw some variants of *Moraea tripetala* (one with very long style crests), a *Lachenalia*, a *Tenicroa*, a white *Spiloxene, Geissorniza inaequalis*, and a ragged specimen of *Moraea bifida*.

Stop #4: Darling. After two days near Nieuwoudtville, we headed south toward Cape Town. We made good time going south, so we decided to make a slight detour to the west to check out the town of Darling. When we were planning our trip, botanist and PBS list subscriber Evan Eifler recommended that we visit Darling, and during the trip we'd heard that the area around Darling was blooming well.

The detour turned out to be a lucky one for us. There was road construction as we entered town, so we turned off onto a side street, driving past small homes with very nice gardens out front, and few of the security walls topped with barbed wire that we'd seen in so many other places. After some fumbling around, we found the Darling Renosterveld Reserve at the southern edge of town. It's open land on a low hill that surrounds a couple of large water tanks. The hill was packed with flowers.

By packed, I don't mean the ground was completely obscured. But there were flowers everywhere we looked, almost all of them bulbs. No single species dominated. They included numerous red

Three Weeks in South Africa (cont'd)

Romulea eximia, white *Moraea fugax* (many with wonderfully hairy monkey beetles on them-see previous page), orange *Gladiolus alatus*, tiny pink *Moraea gawleri*, the weird dark purple *Wurmbea marginata*, little pink *Ixia scillaris*, and many more, along with plenty of annuals. The flowers were almost so dense that you couldn't walk without stepping on them. It was a magical experience.

Above left: Phillipskop landscape, an example of Fynbos. Below left: *Moraea melanops*. Top right: *Wachendorfia paniculata*. Middle right and bottom: *Aristea teretifolia*.

Stop #5: Phillipskop. We spent the next several days sightseeing around Cape Town and the Cape peninsula, including one night in an isolated cottage on a beach near the Cape of Good Hope (expensive but memorable). We didn't see a lot of bulbs, but the unearthly scenery was beautiful. An afternoon at Kirstenbosch Garden is mandatory for gardeners. The garden is huge and beautifully maintained, reaching up a slope on the side of Table Mountain. Unfortunately, the main bulb collection is out of public view, but they do bring pots of blooming things into the main glasshouse.

Next we headed east to Hermanus. This area has a much shorter summer drought than the west coast, and looks very lush to a Californian, despite the lack of trees. We stayed at Phillipskop, a private Fynbos reserve run by PBS list member Chris Whitehouse. Chris is a professional botanist, and has access to a private Renosterveld reserve nearby. He gave me a tour of the Renosterveld in the morning, and then I wandered through the fynbos on his property in the afternoon.

The Renosterveld had been burned the previous autumn, which brought out the bulbs. The ground wasn't covered in bulbs the way it was at Darling, but we saw a very nice variety of flowers, including white *Spiloxene capensis* with variable dark purple and olive green centers, yellow *Moraea bellendenii*, and a spectacular *Moraea melanops*, a tiny plant that whose flower is a spectacular pink radar dish with a blue-black center. But there were two special highlights for me: *Aristea teretifolia* and the very rare *Moraea insolens*.

Aristea teretifolia (For photo, see previous page.) has a large flat flower in white or pink, with a surreal-looking yellow-brown mark on the inner tepals. The color of the central mark was similar to the central color of *Spiloxene capensis*. The *Aristea* was scattered in clusters in several areas of the property, but *Moraea insolens* was in just one area, at the top of a gentle sandy slope. At the base of the slope were *Spiloxene*

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growing near a seasonal pool. At the top were *Wachendorfia paniculata* and the *Moraea*. Only a couple of the *Moraea* plants were in bloom; I was early for them. Later in the season I'm told a couple of dozen were in bloom. This is apparently the second location where *Morea insolens* have been found, and the flowers have fewer cream markings here than the type location.

At Chris's place in the Fynbos there were several bulbs growing in the very sandy soil, including *Geissorhiza ovata*, nicely colored specimens of *Romulea rosea*, tiny orange *Romulea hirsuta*, a yellow Spiloxene, and *Gladiolus hirsutus*. The *Geissorhiza* in particular was a beauty, with very pale pink flowers the color of a seashell.

Chris's property is beautiful, with rocky crags that look like the set for a Tolkein movie. Chris is also a great guide. I recommend him highly.

Stop #6: Hermon. Our final flower stop in the trip was courtesy of iSpot, the online nature-finding community. iSpot hosts a huge number of flower photos from South Africa, along with maps of their locations. I used it to find locations for a couple of plants I longed to see in real life: The brick red form of *Moraea tulbaghensis*, and the fabled orange *Moraea villosa ssp. elandsmontana (*See page 11.). Both are found only in one location: The Elandsberg Nature Reserve, near the town of Hermon. This is northwest of Hermanus, back into an area that is drier in summer. The area is mostly wheat and sheep farms.

Upper left: *Romulea rosea*. Lower left: *Geissorhiza ovata*. Right: *Moraea tulbaghensis*.

Elandsberg is a private reserve and working farm. It includes a luxury B&B called Bartholomeus Klip (highly recommended if you have the money), but the highlight for us was the nature reserve literally right next door. The reserve is a strip of flat Renosterveld about four miles long and half a mile across, and adjoins unfarmed land that stretches east to the mountains of the Waterval Nature Reserve. It's a beautiful spot that gives you a hint of what the countryside must have looked like before the farms arrived.

Dirt roads cut across the property. You can walk, take a guided tour, or borrow a mountain bike and pedal through it. In a brief walk, my wife and I saw big patches of *Geissorhiza aspera, Spiloxene capensis* along a stream, and a few pale blue *Babiana* that I couldn't identify. Then she took a jeep tour, and I borrowed a mountain bike.

Equipped with my maps from iSpot, I set out to find the flowers I wanted to see. I figured it would take me fifteen minutes or so to ride out a couple of miles to the flowers.

I was wrong, for three reasons. First, the nice dirt road at the entrance rapidly deteriorates into narrow wheel ruts with cobbles at the bottom of them, which makes for a very rough and slow ride. Second, I discovered that a road named Vlei Road (Marsh Road) is likely to be six inches under water in the spring. Third, the reserve is home to clouds of gnats and flies that not only pounce on you when you stop, but are capable of keeping up with an amateur bicyclist who's having trouble staying on the track. They didn't bite, thankfully, but they were very annoying.

Nevertheless, it was a great afternoon. My first find was the red *Moraea tulbaghensis*, right where it was supposed to be. A few hundred of them were in glorious full bloom, scattered in an area of about 100 x 50 meters. The flowers have an interesting color pattern: an orange base color overlain with streaks and spots of darker color. From a distance they look red, but up close they are a fascinating mix of shades.

Board of Directors Meeting, July 2016

All board members were present for the July 17, 2016 meeting. Editor Robin Hansen also attended. Minutes of the meeting were approved as amended September 25, 2016.

Treasurer Arnold Trachtenberg reported a balance of $40,806, with no checks outstanding so he can now liquidate the Fidelity account and open one at USB. The next *Bulb Garden* is at the printer with the membership directory inside.

BX/SX Director Dell Sherk reported that the BX is running well. Carl Church is still helping Sherk pack.

Hansen has plans for the next issue. She is still not on the timeline she would like to be on. Board Member Jennifer Hildebrand needs new software for formatting the members' directory. She spends too much time cutting and pasting trying to get information on one page. Excel is not good for this job. Trachtenberg stated that the spring issue (14-2) which is going out is better than ever. He is sending information to Nguyen for archiving.

Membership Director Jane McGary reported a membership of 274. So far 164 2015 members have not yet renewed. Every year one-third of the members have not renewed. There is a box in *The Bulb Garden* saying: "Look at your label to see your expiration date." Free memberships for those who help significantly will be decided on a case by case basis.

McGary has received inquiries on the website asking how to join PBS and what the Society does. She will try to ascertain what bothers people about the website. President Nhu Nguyen is working to convert the Wiki to a database electronically. New entries are being tagged. His goal is to make it easier to navigate the Wiki. For example, one could query yellow flowers, fall blooming, dry conditions, from South America. He will check to be sure URLs are working for sources.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:48 p.m.. The next meeting was set for September 25.

Respectfully submitted,
Kathryn S. Andersen,
PBS Secretary

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Treasurer's Report

BALANCE 7/1/16	**$ 40,312.39**
U.S. Members	**$660.00**
Overseas Members	**$425.00**
BX Receipts	**$4,054.82**
TOTAL INCOME	**$5,139.82**
BX/SX Postage	**($2,061.22)**
BX/SX Supplies	**($79.67)**
BX/SX Support Staff	**($27.05)**
Board Conference Calls	**($92.90)**
Treasurer's Supplies	**($69.45)**
Total Publications	**($1945.00)**
PayPal Expense	**($217.41)**
Postage	**($375.00)**
Investment Results	**($96.17)**
TOTAL EXPENSES	**($4,963.87)**
BALANCE	**$40,488.34**

It's time to renew !

We appreciate your support—
we would hate to lose you!

Renewing is easy. You can renew **ONLINE** ($20 U.S., $25 international) via PayPal. Just use the button on our membership page, http://www.pacificbulbsociety.org/membership.html.

You can also mail in your renewal. Please direct it to Arnold Trachtenberg, 140 Lakeview Avenue, Leonia NJ 07605

Whether renewing online or by mail, please contact Jane McGary (janemcgary@earthlink.net) if any of your contact information has changed.

Thanks again for your continued support of the Pacific Bulb Society!

Three Weeks in South Africa (cont'd)

There was a seasonal pool and a stream nearby, so I'm sure the water table was only a few inches underground, but the local vegetation was very low and grassy. The other bulb that was numerous in the area was a cream-colored *Ixia* with a dark center, perhaps *Ixia abbreviata*.

My original plan was to spend a long time with these flowers, looking for minor color variants, searching for pollinating insects, and so on. But it's amazing how annoying a cloud of bugs can be. After I'd photographed three or four of the nicest plants, I found I had lost interest in standing there any longer. So I headed east toward the mountains, in search of *Moraea villosa ssp. elandsmontana*.

of eucalyptus. The local vegetation was shoulder-high bushes, much denser and overgrown compared to the grassy plain I had visited earlier. I was worn out from all the biking (Did I mention that I hadn't really biked in 20 years?), so I walked my bike along the road slowly, seeing nothing other than the tall bushes. I was literally on the verge of giving up when I glanced over to the right and saw a spot of orange among the bushes. I worked my way over to it, and sure enough, there was *M. villosa* ssp. *elandsmontana*. I found others scattered nearby in ones and twos. It's very hard to get an accurate photograph of these flowers. In person they're a vibrant tangerine-orange shade, almost fluorescent that's unlike anything else I've seen. The central eye, very dark blue, looks black in most photos.

Top: *Lachenalia* (probably) *elegans*. Above left: Countryside near Philipskop. Right: *Bobartia* spp.

The soil here was the very fine Renosterveld silt, similar in texture to what I had seen elsewhere, but this time dark gray in color. I'm sure the soil was well watered, but the water table wasn't as high as my first stop. As a result, mercifully, there were fewer bugs.

Once again it was a wretched trek through standing water and rutted roads, and I thoroughly enjoyed it. Scattered along the jeep trails I saw various various *Romuleas* and *Lachenalias*, plus individuals of the more common *Moraea villosa* ssp. *villosa*. Most of those were pale violet with a dark blue eye, but one battered individual was royal purple with a maroon band around the blue eye. It was growing in the middle of the jeep track (where it was probably hit by a jeep several times a day).

It was nearly sunset by the time I got to the spot for *Moraea villosa ssp. elandsmontana* (See photo next page.). It was along yet another dirt road, near a stand

After photographing *Moraea villosa* ssp. *elandsmontana* and a weird yellow-flowered rush-like plant nearby (probably a *Bobartia* species), I pedaled back to our rented cottage in the twilight. Along the way I spooked two small antelope that ran ahead of me into the darkness. Fortunately, it was downhill all the way, and I arrived before my wife sent out a search party for me.

Three Weeks in South Africa (cont'd)

After that we headed east, visiting game parks and getting up close with meerkats, lions, elephants, and more types of antelope than I can count. I could write another three thousand words about that, but there were relatively few bulbs along the way, so I'll skip it. Suffice it to say, my wife got to see a lot of animals as compensation for putting up with my bulb mania in the first week of the trip.

Above: ***Moraea villosa*** **ssp.** ***elandsmontana*****. Below:** ***Moraea villosa*** **ssp.** ***villosa*****.**

If you go...

For bulbs, get a guide or take your chances. If you go to South Africa in spring and guide yourself around, you will definitely see flowers. The locals will give you advice on where to look, and you'll be able to find many interesting things in the reserves and parks. But if you're after particular species, or the absolute best spots, you should probably hire a guide or advisor. As a naive foreigner, I pictured South Africa as a vast wilderness of untouched land. The reality is that it's very well developed. Many of the mountain ranges are in good condition, but the flats – especially the fertile areas of the western Cape – have almost all been converted to farms and ranches and cities. Many of the rarer bulb species are in tiny postage stamps of unploughed land surrounded by private farms, and you can't get access to them unless you have a guide who can secure you an invitation. Members of the PBS mail list will be glad to point you to good people.

Renting a car is easy, as long as you can get comfortable driving on the left side of the road. Be very cautious on busy two-lane highways near the cities, as some South Africans have a habit of passing on blind curves. You'll come around a corner to find a car in your lane, driving toward you at high speed. As long as you're alert, this is survivable – you duck quickly to the left into the emergency parking lane. But it's scary the first time it happens. And every other time.

Be prudent about where you go. The countryside is generally safe, and the freeways in Cape Town and Port Elizabeth are fine. But secondary roads in the city can lead you into sketchy areas dotted with signs that say things like "High smash-and-grab theft zone". Keep your valuables out of sight in the car, use common sense about driving into areas that look questionable, and you should be fine.

There are self-catering rental cottages all over the countryside. They're reasonably priced and comfortable, as long as you don't mind cooking your own food. TripAdvisor and Airbnb have good listings. South Africans don't focus as much on central heating as Americans, so your cottage may be cold at night; however the bedding is usually very warm.

Use iSpot. As I mentioned above, it's a great way to find the locations for particular plant species. It'll also give you the dates when they were photographed, so you know when to try to see them (although blooming dates can shift a couple of weeks plus or minus depending on the particular year).

Be a generous tipper. I'm not an economist, so I won't try to analyze South Africa's economic structure. But suffice it to say that there are a lot of people in marginal service jobs: standing guard over parked cars, pumping gas, etc. Most of them are friendly and give very good service, and it's just plain polite to give them 10 rand (about 70 cents) as a thank you. You'll help them make ends meet, and you're saving a bundle on the low prices for everything else. Think of it as a tourism fee.

Ed. Note: Mike can be reached at michaelcmace@gmail.com

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Arnold Trachtenberg
140 Lakeview Avenue
Leonia NJ 07605

www.pacificbulbsociety.org

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Gardening with Bulbs

Michael Mace describes his visit to incredibly bulb-rich South Africa and its various habitats in this issue. Above: *Gladiolus liliaceus*, photo by Michael

Inside This Edition:

The Bulb Garden is the newsletter of the Pacific Bulb Society (PBS). It is published, if enough articles are submitted, around the third week of each quarter and is available to PBS members. This newsletter provides gardening or bulb related articles, news of interest to members, and announcements of the PBS organization.

Editor: Robin Hansen, robin@hansennursery.com; Co-Editor: Jennifer Hildebrand

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