

# HERBS

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This pictorial newsletter gives you the latest Hermanus Botanical Society news and views on the fynbos scene. It also appears on our website [www.fernkloof.com](http://www.fernkloof.com)

## REPORT FROM THE CHAIR

Impossible to believe, but true...2010 is almost at an end. What a busy year it has been, and certainly in matters botanical it has also been fascinating. As happens every year, the fynbos continues to astound and delight us – and for those of a philosophical bent, to offer lessons in living that seem often to have a lot to do with sheer tenacity. It is always difficult to pick out one highlight, but that light this year would probably have to shine on Hoogie's discovery of a healthy population of the "thought-to-be-extinct" *Erica jasminiflora* in the Hemel-en-Aarde valley.

The Flower & Eco Fair this year was once again a great success, despite a run-up period that was so full of mishaps it eventually became a bit ridiculous; if it was a theatre script it would have fallen firmly into the "farce" category. However, all was fine "on the night" and those who attended thoroughly enjoyed themselves. We introduced some innovations this year, such as the shuttle service from the lower parking area. This proved a practical solution to the perennial parking problem, but should be much more visible next year. The Eco side of the Fair had some really interesting displays and presentations, and the new flower team – backed up by science – did us proud.



Elsa Carstens, co-ordinator of the Floral Exhibits



Werner Jacobs 'Water Wise show garden'  
Photo: Anina Lee

The Bowling Club catering team was able to step in at short notice to rescue the situation following Annemari's unfortunate accident, and this naturally dented our profits somewhat. One element that did not come to the party was the weather. Two pleasant days were followed by a wet, chilly and windy weekend. That, combined with important rugby on TV, meant that attendance over the weekend was very low. Despite this however, profits were much the same as last year and this means that our strained finances have been given a slight reprieve. So many people gave of their time and effort that it would be impossible to mention individuals, but our very sincere thanks go to all who were involved in this important event on our town's calendar.

The new brochure we brought out last year has proved so popular it is now in the reprint process, and is now complemented by the new Fernkloof hikers' map. A lot of time and effort went into the production of this map; Jim and Ann Sweet in particular put many hours into ensuring that it is both accurate and user-friendly. It incorporates full descriptions of the most popular routes and has been enthusiastically received by hikers.

Members talks nights continue to attract good audiences and provide food for thought and sheer enjoyment. At the most recent, an international succulent expert, Frans Noltee, shared the survival strategies of these ultra water-wise plants with a presentation that incorporated science and visual poetry. We have purchased a copy for our library of his CD titled "Succulent plants of the little Karoo", which illustrates nearly 250 species and gives descriptions as well as scientific and common names.

At this time of the year one's thoughts are largely taken up by the impending holiday season and time spent with family and friends. Please spare some thoughts though for Botsoc's needs next year and what you can do to assist the work of our society. Our beautiful environment around Hermanus is under constant pressure, as are the public officials charged with its care. Civil society (that means all of us!) needs to play an increasingly concerned role in ensuring its conservation and survival. Organisations like Botsoc are vital to this.

The Committee wishes you all a happy, healthy and safe festive season and renewed vigour for the coming year.

**Pat Miller**

## **BE FASCINATED BY OUR FLOWER NAMES – NOT FLOORED!**

Do you throw up your hands in horror when presented with botanical tongue-twisters such as *Leucospermum conocarpodendron* and *Aristea oligocephala*? Don't give up hope. A comprehensive work on the origin of the scientific names of our local flora should be ready early next year which will help all interested rambles.

Geoffrey Andrew, long time member of our society, has spent the past five years clarifying and analyzing the classical and other namings of more than 1600 species in the Fernkloof Reserve (Cliff Path included) and Vogelgat Private Nature Reserve. More than 160 pages later (which includes an 18-page appendix of persons and books relevant to the work) he is producing a document which meticulously researches the meanings and derivations of all the genera and species in our area. Origins of family names will follow.

In his Fernkloof home above the Mossel River, he is surrounded by a formidable 20 volume Second Edition (1989) of the Oxford English dictionary, a mass of research books and material and one slim volume which he names as one of the most helpful sources of information. It is *Botanical Names – What They Mean: Wild Flowers of the Cape Peninsula* by Deon Kesting and Hugh Clarke.

Geoffrey is fascinated by his studies and by the *International Code of Botanical Nomenclature* (1988) which states: "The name of a genus is a substantive in the singular number or a word treated as such. It may be taken from any source whatever and may even be composed in an absolutely arbitrary manner".

The Code also recommends to botanists who are forming names "to use Latin terminations in so far as possible; to avoid names not readily adaptable to the Latin tongue; not to make names which are very long or difficult to pronounce in Latin".

Here are some of his favourite namings:

**ERICA** From the Greek *ereike* meaning 'to pound'. Used for heaths by Theophrastus (372-287 BC) and Pliny the Elder (AD 23-79) and refers to the supposed property of some species to break gall stones.

**ELEGIA** Linnaean name from the Greek *elegia*, 'song of lamentation'

**DISA** Probably alludes to Disa, a legendary Swedish queen

*Brunia alopecuroides* From Greek *alopec* meaning 'fox' and Latin *urus* meaning 'tailed'

*Aristea oligocephala* From Greek *oligos* meaning 'small or sparse' and *cephalus*, 'headed'

*Brunsvigia orientalis* For the Duke of Brunswick and Latin *oriens* and *alis* meaning 'pertaining to the sunrise/of the dawn'

*Agathosma* means 'heavenly scent', *Agapanthus* means 'love flower'.



*Brunsvigia orientalis* – 'sunrise' or 'of the dawn'



*Agapanthus* – 'love flower'

Our own botanists, Dr Ion Williams and Mrs Priscilla Drewe, have been honoured with the naming of several species such as *Tritoniopsis williamsiana* and *Otholobium dreweae*.



And not to forget the giant golden pincushion which grows in the shadow of the Northcliff mountains, *Leucospermum conocarpodendron subsp. viridis* (left).

It has all of six classical 'derivatives' – *leucos*=white; *sperma*=seed; *konos*=cone; *carpos*=fruit; *dendron*=tree; *viridis*=greenish.

Thank you Geoffrey, for all your dedication and hard work. We look forward to seeing this treatise next year in booklet form when a sponsor is found.

**Geraldine Gardiner**

## Some of the 'CRACK' and 'ROCK' PLANTS OF FERNKLOOF

A scramble over the rocky outcrops in Fernkloof will often be rewarded by the sight of little plants bravely surviving the elements of cold, wind and rain or the scorching sun of summer.

These plants have adapted themselves to these conditions enabling them to grow and flower in the thinnest of cracks, others take on a diminutive form and grow in little sand pockets in rock hollows, and others survive by taking advantage of the shelter and shade provided by the overhanging rocks.

Fernkloof has four plants which have been given the 'species' name *rupestris*, meaning 'rock or cliff dwelling'.

***Brachysyphon rupestris***, often only noticed when in flower by the flash of pink on a rock face, is found only in the Kleinrivier Mountains and described as Rare in the Red List.

***Crassula rupestris*** has the descriptive common names of Concertina Plant and Sosaties. The dainty flowers appear in clusters at the end of the stems and are white with a tinge of pink. It manages to camouflage itself expertly against the rock face.



*Brachysyphon rupestris*



*Crassula rupestris*

***Centella rupestris***, a member of the Apiaceae family, is found at altitudes between 500 and 700 metres, and often goes unnoticed because of its nondescript appearance. Another species, *Centella triloba* also favours rocky outcrops and can sometimes be seen literally 'hanging' from cracks in the cliff face.

***Stilbe rupestris*** or Rock Stilbe has attractive pink or white flowers and grows from cracks at altitudes of 100 to 100 metres. The plant is a member of the Stilbaceae family.



*Centella rupestris*



*Stilbe rupestris*

In addition to the '*rupestris*' plants there are others inviting a closer look!

An unusual mound-like plant, with the tongue-twisting name of *Bryomorpha aretioides*, (*bruon*, = moss and *morphe*, = form, implying 'moss-like habit') is a plant that clings to exposed rocks at high altitudes and when in flower appears as mauve cushions on the rocks. It is one of our very few plants which is alpine in habit. Its common name of Mossy Clubmoss Daisy describes it aptly. It can be seen in flower at the top of Droë Kloof in the summer months.

*Teedia lucida*, Stinkbos or Lilac Berry, is not often seen, and only really noticed when it flowers. They are usually found as isolated plants in little pockets of sand in rock hollows. The attractive flowers appear from September to January. This is the only species occurring in Fernkloof.



*Bryomorpha aretioides*



*Teedia lucida*

The species name of *Erica petrophila* aptly describes its habit, *petro* meaning 'rock' and *philus* meaning 'lover of' which refers to the plants seeming ability to cling to rock faces. This very dainty little *Erica*, reaching no more than 20cm in diameter, has leaves, sepals and corolla covered with gland-tipped hairs which make it sticky to the touch.



*Erica petrophila* Photo: Brent Jenkin



Christine Wakfer perched 'up high'

So when next out on the Fernkloof slopes take time to explore the rock gardens and give a thought to our intrepid photographers who sometimes risk life and limb to record our botanical splendours!

## WHAT'S FLOWERING

Four members of the *Harveya* genus from the family Orobanchaceae or Broomrape are flowering in Fernkloof in November and December.

These holoparasitic perennials parasitise the roots of various other plants. *Harveya's*, which turn black when bruised or dried, were used by early settlers for making ink, hence the common name Inkbloem. All four species have unusual knob-like stigmas and scale-like leaves.

The genus is named after William Harvey, d. 1920, Irish treasurer-general of the Cape Colony, who was the chief author of *Flora Capensis*.



*Harveya capensis*



*Harveya purpurea*

*Harveya capensis*, whose delicate white flowers are probably pollinated by moths, is parasitic on *Cliffortia*, *Searsia* and *Erica* plants.

*Harveya purpurea* is the smallest and its flowers are white to pink with yellow blotches in the throat. The root parasite of this *Harveya* is the Campanulaceae or Bellflower family.



*Harveya squamosa*



*Harveya tabulosa*

*Harveya squamosa* is bright orange with a stout, fleshy stem and can be found in deep sandy soils. The host plants of this species are the *Willdenowia* of the Restionaceae, and *Othonna* in the Asteraceae family. *Harveya squamosa* is most likely pollinated by sunbirds.

The flower stalk of the *Harveya tabulosa* is 15-50cm high and is stiffly hairy and purplish in colour. The vernacular name of this plant is Jakaranda-inkbloem because of the pink-mauve colour of the flower.

## 'The Cape Mistletoe'



The Mistletoe or *Viscum album* is known as a festive decoration in Europe and the tradition of kissing underneath a few sprigs at Christmas time is thought to instil feelings of romance! It is a partially parasitic evergreen that can be found on many woodland trees.

Fernkloof has its own mistletoe, *Viscum capense* or Cape Mistletoe, with translucent white berries. It parasitizes the stems of various shrubs including our *Searsia*, *Passerina* and *Chrysanthemoides*, and is more often seen along our cliff paths than on our mountain slopes.

## *Eulophia litoralis* 'Yellow orchid'

Spotted by Corrie Lucas on the road up to the Three Dams in early December, two plants of the beautiful, bright yellow orchid *Eulophia litoralis*, (Photo: Christine Wakfer). The resupinate flowers lack pouches or spurs, and the lower lip has a cushion of yellow hairs. It is described as Endangered in the Red List and is only known from 3-5 locations.

Destruction of coastal fynbos habitats by urban expansion and invasion by alien plants have resulted in the decline of subpopulations.



## DATES TO DIARISE

**14<sup>th</sup> January 2011**

Annual General Meeting : Fernkloof Hall

**4<sup>th</sup> March 2011**

Botanical Society Braai at Fernkloof

*"A Happy Floral Christmas"*

We welcome any contributions to, or feedback on the newsletter.

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