



# CHS NEWS

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JUNE 2014

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## MONTHLY MEETING

**Mon, 7 July 2014 at 20:00** at The Athenaeum, Newlands  
(R8 for members and R20 for visitors)

David Davidson will regale us with his view of

*Chelsea 2014 and a few special English gardens*

## NEXT OUTING

**Thurs, 31 July at 10:30:** Visit the Vera School for Autistic Learners.

Vera School was founded in 1970 and was the first school in the world custom built for learners with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), one of only five Autism Specific Government schools in South Africa. Autism is a severe, life long, developmental disability of neurobiological cause. The school, with 145 learners, is situated on a 1,5 hectare piece of land in the residential suburb of Rondebosch East.

As the education and treatment of learners with ASD is regarded internationally as the most demanding, a high teacher-learner ratio is essential. The full staff complement at Vera is 74. The Department of Education acknowledges the need for the high staff-learner ratio and allocates more staff to Vera in relation to other schools. The allocation, however, is not enough and Vera has to spend the largest part of the budget on salaries in order to maintain the present effective staff complement.

Due to the shortage of funds for niceties like a garden, in January last year a plea went out to members to donate plants to beautify the Vera School's garden. Now is your chance to see how the bare patches have been filled.

Limited to 25 members. Please let Glenda have your name by no later than 29 July.

## REPORT BACK

### June Plant Table:

Brought in by members (left to right): *Restios* and grasses; *Crassula barklyi*; *Haworthia turgida*



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## **FOTAG Report January to April 2014:**

Lisa Conradie give feedback on their project *Renaissance of the Arderne Gardens*

"Phase 1 (to the right of the centre of the garden), has been covered in past reports, and is now more-or-less complete. This means that the bulk of the work has been done (clearing, mulching, planting), but maintenance is ongoing: the area has received three applications of foliar feed to boost new plantings before and after the Christmas break; irrigation with drag lines once a week; weeding; pest control (diatomaceous earth was used with good results, for a pest which was chewing *Plectranthus*); more planting, especially at the beginning of February, of *Tulbaghia* from earlier donations (Mills family – thank you) and Clivias were planted around the top pond below the *Quercus suber* and in various other spots around the pond. More *Plectranthus* was planted out around the pond. This is currently flowering beautifully. *Cyperus* 'nana' was planted in spots around the pond – much of this was donated by Wilma, a member of FOTAG.

The very first area to be planted up in winter last year is now nicely settled. The area next to the bridge was planted up with *Gunnera manicata* (from the garden) and *Dietes grandiflora*, and is awaiting *Zantedeschia aethiopica* which will be planted in May. Duck protection has been reinforced around the top pond, with excellent results.

Pink *Nymphaea* plants were collected from a source in Somerset West – these were donated by Anne Bean. Bird netting to protect against ducks was donated by Hank Lith. Thank you kindly Anne and Hank. I designed and made 5 fish and duck-proof lily pots using old 80l black bins, and bamboo from the garden (right). The lilies were planted in two sections of the top pond. The water is quite deep in parts and there is a deep layer of silt/mud in the pond, so this was quite an exciting experience. The Lilies have been successfully planted and no duck/fish damage detected so far: now just awaiting growth in spring. *Nelumbo nucifera* plants will be planted in the long trough in the top pond, in spring. There are a few *Aponogeton distachyos* plants, grown from bulbs, ready to be planted out in the bottom pond. Louisiana Irises from my garden were planted in two spots at the top and middle ponds, respectively.

Donated plant material has been collected and either 'heeled in' in a holding area, or planted out directly. The holding area is the strip of bed between the nursery and the path leading down to the public toilets.

Trenches were dug and the plants – mostly *Agapanthus* and *Dietes* – were trimmed and heeled in, ready for future use. Thank you Des and Hank for helping coordinate donated plant material and thank you Francois for providing a bakkie for collection of material. Thank you Harold for the donation of Michaelmas daisies.

The large *Cyperus papyrus* plants were removed and a *Rhododendron ponticum* cut back, to open up the view of the large Camphor tree. The area was also cleared for the second time as weeds had come up again. A *Tibouchina elegans* and small clump of Louisiana Irises, my donation, have taken and are growing nicely in this area. Also new to this area (where the top pond overflows into the middle pond) is a patch of cream coloured Canna lilies kindly donated by Sally Graaff and collected by Hank Lith.

Work on phase 2 (area from the entrance along the right hand side of the path), started at the beginning of February. After James and I had thinned and cleared out most of the *Cyperus papyrus* that was starting to overcrowd the middle pond, Krige Trees provided a team for the day and the area at the back of the middle pond was cleared and much of the *Cyperus papyrus* was removed where it had also formed a dense stand on the bank. Trees around the middle and bottom ponds were pruned.

Krige Trees provided an extra labourer for a further two days to help mulch and weed the area.

Phase 3 (central part of the garden), has already been started in part, and includes the entrance to the gardens and the front lawn which will be linked to the *Ficus macrophylla* beyond the *Raphiolepis* hedge, by removing the hedge (this was partly done in April by Krige Trees) and adjacent overgrown hedges, and creating more lawned areas and some ground cover areas. The beds to the left and right of the entrance to the garden will be landscaped. Preparation for this phase has begun: Krige Trees has cleared much of the front area and James and I have prepared the soil which had been badly compacted, and planted Flax (next to the large bamboo stand to the right of the entrance).





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Seed received from Swartland municipality last year has been milled at the Kirstenbosch seed room and 114 punnets have been sown in the Newlands nursery greenhouse

A comprehensive plan for areas covering the whole garden has been developed by the new FOTAG subcommittee.

Funding applications have been sent to Rowland and Leta Hill Trust; Cape Tercentenary Foundation and the Frank Robb Charitable Trust, based on the new plan, which aims to employ more labour and operational management to complete phase three, as well as providing most of the materials (gravel; groundcover and turf).

Many thanks to Hank Lith for guidance and time spent correcting and proof reading grant applications and for the creation of an ambitious new plan for the gardens. With the new plan we can finally set to work creating the plant material wish list to send to The Cape Horticultural Society and others.

Please note that any offers of plant material should be run by the FOTAG sub-committee before acceptance, to ensure that material is suitable for the garden – for example, it would be counter-productive to plant newly cleared areas with tall shrubs again."

[Ed: It's good to see a number of our members so involved with FOTAG.]

We will await the FOTAG plant wish list rather than flooding them with unwanted plant material. If you have plants that need urgent transplanting and can't wait for their list, then make contact with Lisa of FOTAG at [secretary@ardernegardens.org.za](mailto:secretary@ardernegardens.org.za).

As mentioned in last month's CHS News, there are still funds available to make labels for the remaining trees in Arderne Gardens. Members who attended the tree tour around Arderne in April may recall how few trees were properly labelled – or not labelled at all. Last month's speaker, Morné Faulhamer, also commented on this. If you would like to add to the coffers of our Arderne Label Project fund to ensure the remaining trees get labelled, contact our Treasurer at [diesveld@netactive.co.za](mailto:diesveld@netactive.co.za).

## ***Kirstenbosch's Tree Canopy Walkway***

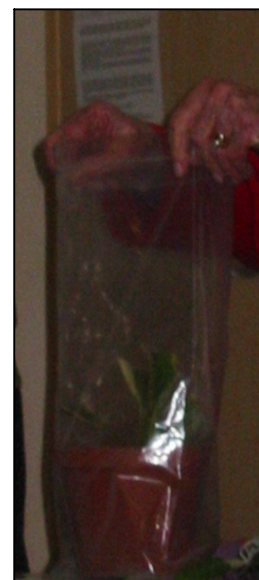


SANBI has outdone itself with this new "Boomslang" walkway. Cherise gave us all the inside information on this project, from inception to fruition. It is indeed a fantastic piece of engineering and even though it looks rather unstable from ground level (left), it is very sturdy above. Travel sickness pills were not necessary! The view from the top is stunning.

## WHAT NEEDS DOING FOR THE PLANT SALE – Part 1

### Making cuttings:

- Cut a branch which (a) has fresh leaves, (b) has not had flowers recently, and (c) which is not too supple – rather at half-woody stage.
- Have a pot and place a layer of coir (available at nurseries) at the bottom to stop the soil running out.
- Put sand into the pot. Ask at the nurseries for sand without silt (not sand from edge of a river or with mud) – a coarser sand.
- Cut the stem just below the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> node (where the leaves join the stem) from the top.
- Use a dibber (wooden spike) to make a hole in the sand for the cutting. Put the stem deep enough into the pot so that it touches the bottom.
- Water evaporates through the plant's leaves, so cut them in half (across the middle of the leaf). This will not affect the plant.
- Do not water the plant from the top, but put it into a basin of water. The water must go up the side of the pot, and must not overflow into the top of the pot. When the sand on the surface is wet, then it has been thoroughly soaked.
- Remove from the basin.
- Take a large plastic bag which is taller than the plant and place the plant, on its tray, in the bottom. Use pegs to seal the top of the bag, but a Ziploc type bag is preferable.
- You could also use a straw to blow air into the bag to keep it away from the leaves.
- Leave in a shady place, undisturbed, for about a month.
- When roots start coming out of the bottom of the pot, remove from the bag.
- A light spray of Kelpac would be beneficial (read the instructions).
- Throw out any excess water in the tray and re-seal.
- Do not add any water and wait for the plant to show signs of growth.
- If nothing has happened in 4 – 6 weeks, throw the stem away and start again.



## COLLECTOR'S CORNER

Barbara Knox-Shaw of Freshwoods in Elgin is addicted to the species *Cyclamen*

"I could never be without cyclamen while I have a patch of soil or a windowsill. Not because they thrive in that most difficult of situations, the dreaded dry shade, or because they burst into cheerful flower when there's nothing else. Not even because they are so easy to grow and multiply so prolifically. No, there's something irresistible about them that I can't quite pinpoint, but that makes them the most addictive of plants, like chocolate or cocaine, and I am hooked.

For a start, all cyclamen have beautiful flowers, and no other plant (except perhaps the North American Dodecatheon or Shooting Star) has its charming habit of throwing its petals skywards, like a lot of little bunny ears. It's in the Primula family, and if you bend the petals down you can see it. It can flower prolifically, but generally produces them over a long period, which is sensible if pollinators are scarce in the winter. The leaves never disappoint, and if one grew cyclamen just for their foliage, they would still be highly prized. The leaf variation is immense. Imagine a kaleidoscope, endlessly twisting, no two patterns ever the same, and you have a field of cyclamen.

Even in November, when the flowers are over and the leaves withered, the fat seedheads on their tightly coiled stalks are still fascinating. In nearly all species the coiled stalks pull the seedheads to the ground, close to the parent tuber, probably as a defence against grazing goats. Some species coil one way, and others the other way, no one knows quite why. Only the Persian cyclamen doesn't coil. Instead, like a Haemanthus, the stalk ends up lying flat on the ground, so the seeds fall as far from the parent as possible, perhaps giving them a chance of colonizing fresh ground, an advantage where water is sparse. Once the seedheads have split open like little pomegranates, and the sticky seeds tumbled out, the fat tubers sit exposed on top of the ground, apparently abandoned, but actually almost impossible to dislodge.



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Cyclamen are Mediterranean plants. Turkey is the epicentre, but they occur all over the Mediterranean basin from France to Iran, from the coast to the mountains, most often in steep places in woods or among rocks, sometimes in huge quantity. They also occur in North Africa, and a new species was recently discovered as far south as Somalia, right on the northern part of the Horn of Africa. Only two people have ever seen it, and the place has since become too dangerous for a subsequent visit. It is a remnant of an ancient Mediterranean flora that once stretched to the Equator.

Because they are Mediterranean, they are superbly adapted to our climate at the Cape. Like most Cape bulbs, they rest during the dry season, and come into active growth during the autumn. The best time to sow them is between January and March, and the vigorous ones can be pricked out into little pots or polycell trays; the others can be left for a year. Most seeds will come up in the first year, but all good seeds will eventually germinate, even after 3 years. They can be moved at almost any time, though it's always best done when they are just coming into active growth. They can generally be planted out in the garden in their second year. Drainage is critical to their long life, though they should never be bone dry for too long, even when dormant.

First of all to flower – sometimes even before December is out – is the widespread *C. hederifolium*



(left). The flowers are usually pink, less often white, but the most highly prized form is a rich glowing plum. Also prized are the pewter and silver foliaged forms, with the best producing a shimmer rather than a gleam. The famous gardener E A Bowles tried for years to produce silver-leaved forms without success, but gardeners today are far luckier; even the group of plants named 'Bowles Apollo', which is supposed to derive from his breeding, nowadays frequently produces silver forms.

The very closely related *C. africanum* (right) from Algeria and Tunisia is almost identical except it is invariably bigger in its flowers and leaves; perhaps a little coarser too, but always vigorous. In both species, the leaves appear later.



Next to flower are the Turkish *C. cilicium*, most often a pale pink but with an elusive white form too, and *C. intaminatum*, with small white flowers delicately pencilled with faint grey stripes. Then comes the Greek *C. graecum*, in the wild a lover of hot spots among rocks, but often shy to flower in the garden. No matter, for its foliage is perhaps the most varied in the genus, with every assortment of spots, dots and dashes imaginable. It makes long roots that will descend over a metre to find water if they have to.



Now is the main season, characterized chiefly by *C. coum*, with its dumpy little flowers produced endlessly right through the winter, from April to September, easy in a pot, wonderful on the windowsill, but also a favourite for naturalizing. Also from Turkey is *C. mirabile*, which in its best form has miraculous pink flushed foliage.

After midwinter come a number of real specialities. *C. balearicum* – mainly from the Balearics - produces beautifully patterned silvery leaves of jagged shape, and tiny white flowers. *C. creticum* – found only on Crete – is small but robust, and has unmarked white flowers that tremble in the breeze. *C. libanoticum*

(above) was once thought extinct in the wild, but there is a tiny population left in the mountains near Beirut. This strange looking cyclamen has very distinctive fat dumpy whitish flowers that smell of polecat. *C. cyprium*, only found in Cyprus, has beautiful elegantly held white flowers with pink markings known as auricles. The dark purple *C. pseudibericum* (right) took 5 years to flower for me, but now does so regularly.



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Three great species remain. First comes *C. persicum*, widespread in the Middle East, easy to grow, quick to flower, and ravishing in its wild form, which is almost always scented. The flowers can be pink, white, or even purple. The Dutch managed to create the super-sized Florist's Cyclamen from it by soaking tubers in chemicals to alter their genetic structure. This gross plant quite rightly has a strong death wish about it, and is the reason most people are put off growing cyclamen. The wild form is much easier, and flourishes in the ground or in a pot. It is easily the most free-flowering of the whole tribe, and in August and September one tuber can produce fifty blooms at a time. It needs free drainage and excellent winter light, and can take almost complete drought when dormant.

The second-last species, *C. repandum*, the spring-flowering cyclamen from Italy and Greece, is utterly charming. Who can forget a clump of it fluttering in the breeze? The petals are translucent and seem to glow from within in the spring light. The foliage is stunning, especially in the form from the Peloponnese whose true name botanists still argue over. There is a white-flowered form from Italy as well, which catches the breath. It has the loveliest of scents, which it sheds freely on the air. It peaks in September and October, and is easier to grow in the ground than in a pot.

The last cyclamen is *C. purpurascens* from the European mountains, and most famously from Lake Garda. It's the only evergreen cyclamen, and flowers mainly in December and January when it should by rights be asleep. Surprisingly, it does well with us, though only in a pot for some reason I can't fathom. Try it, and all the others too. It will be a lifetime's addiction, more delicious than chocolate and healthier than cocaine.

The Cyclamen Society in the UK is the main resource for information and seed. See [www.cyclamen.org](http://www.cyclamen.org). The annual subscription is modest, and the seed list wonderful. The chief book on the subject is *Cyclamen* by Christopher Grey-Wilson (Timber Press)."

## ITEMS OF INTEREST

Our Honorary Member in the UK, Colin Cook, who unfortunately could not attend the outing to Abalimi this month, does have his own veggie patch in Somerset (below).



## DATES TO DIARISE

- ❖ 6/7 September: CHS Flower and Garden Show at the Alphen Centre, Constantia
- ❖ 20 September: Annual CHS Plant Sale in Marina da Gama
- ❖ 25 – 28 Sept: Hermanus Botanical Society Annual Flower Festival from 09:00 to 17:00. Entrance: R20. For further information, contact [botsochermanus@telkomsa.net](mailto:botsochermanus@telkomsa.net) or tel. 028-313-8100.

(Photographs: Andrew and Glenda Thorpe, Lynn Cook, [www.cyclamen.org](http://www.cyclamen.org))