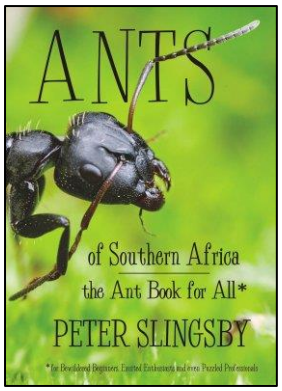
CHS NEWS

July 2018

NEXT MEETING

Monday, 6 August 2018 at 20:00 at The Athenaeum, Newlands



ANTS OF SOUTHERN AFRICA …
… – the Ant Book for All*

*(bewildered beginners, excited enthusiasts and even puzzled professionals)

Peter Slingsby will give an illustrated talk on his newest publication – the first Field Guide to Southern African ants ever published – and will have copies for sale at R250 each (cash only).

Excerpt from https://www.nhbs.com/ants-of-southern-africa-book

Lavishly illustrated with Philip Herbst's fabulous macrophotographs, and the best of some fifty more observers from 'iSpot', the book details 225 of the most common species, with notes about another 400. Also included are comprehensive habitat and locality endpaper maps, index and bibliography.

"Peter Slingsby writes with humour and with a refreshing lack of pomposity. With its amazing photos and Peter's superb illustration, this is a very welcome addition to the books on the natural history of southern Africa and will surely open eyes and minds to these intriguing and important insects." – William Bond, Senior Scientist, SAEON

"The colour images of live ants, the 'how common' ranking, providing the actual size, the major habitats, the distribution – all this is genius!" – Brian L. Fisher, California Academy of Sciences

"The pics are superb and the layout and text very easy to follow, and informative. It's going to be a very useful resource for ecologists... using ants as indicator species" – Mike D. Picker, Associate Professor, Biological Sciences, UCT.

At our last meeting Melanie advised that this month there is going to be a fun raffle of delicious treats from all over the world. Tickets will be very inexpensive, so please bring an extra five or ten rand to get some tickets.

NEXT OUTING

Sat, 11 August: Visit 2 gardens landscaped by Clare Burgess. We will start at the Papenboom Meadow project in Newlands at 09h30 and move on to a garden in Constantia. Let Glenda have your name by 6 August.

REPORT BACK

July Plant Table (suburb – source of water)
Jenny reports: "Things are flowering now. It's not just the weeds that are growing. We are getting interesting things.

Pinelands – only rain water:
Chasmanthe aethiopica: native to Western Cape (Darling to Eastern Cape); one of the earliest flowering cormous plants from April to July; grows to 60mm tall (taller one is *C floribunda* and *C bicolour* is much rarer)

Pinelands – grey water:
Thunbergia alata (grown from seed): from Eastern Cape to East Africa on forest margins; does need some water in summer; pops up everywhere.
Thunbergia alata (selected form from nursery – right): flowers are double the size and never without flowers; easy to train along a trellis.
Growing from seed isn't always the answer when you can buy the selected form at a nursery. You will get a much improved plant – it's bigger and more vigorous and the flowers are bigger and it's stunning.

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https://www.facebook.com/pages/Cape-Horticultural-Society/779615695489381

Impatiens: full sun or semi-shade; trim back regularly to keep bushy and to propagate cuttings. A suggestion to the grower to propagate these for the Plant Sale. When they were decimated a few years ago, we never really got back into growing them. They are very attractive (right) and often bigger than the single little coloured ones.
Heliotrope: growing in a pot in full sun; nip regularly; fairly drought-tolerant. Pale, off-white form is much more fragrant.
Salvia
Matthiola longipetala?? "Stocks" – have been seen escaping onto the mountain. Something else to pot up for the Plant Sale.
Encephalartos ?? (far right): bought at a Bonsai show four years ago, but without any background it is difficult to know the species.




Kirstenhof – wellpoint:
Cotyledon orbiculata 'pig's ear' or 'plakkies': from dry areas (Karoo); usually like it very dry but seemed to have loved the rain we've been getting.
Selenicereus anthonyanus 'Fishbone cactus' from Mexico (right)
Impatiens hybrid (top, far right): needs shade; seeds itself everywhere. These would also be nice for the Plant Sale.

Irisene (EX) – looks very much like the Coleus but it doesn't bolt into flower quite as readily and it has very attractive leaves. Some are yellow-green and some this lovely plum colour.
Euryops pectinatus
Zantedeschia aethiopica 'Arum lily'"

JENNY'S CHOICES FOR JULY

EXOTIC	INDIGENOUS
Kirstenhof - wellpoint water *Stenocarpus sinuatis* "Australian firewheel" – another one of our Proteaceae that jumped the ocean and ended up in the tropical NE corner of Australia. 	**Kirstenhof – wellpoint water (different garden)** *Cotyledon decussata* "Bergbesie": blue-green finger-shaped leaves; flowers late winter or spring; grows naturally as a groundcover about 60cm high and over a metre wide; widely distributed throughout the country. 

Book Prize Winners


Michael Tuffin, Sihle and Prof Charl Laubscher

A CHS Book Prize winner for the 4th year in succession, Sihle Ngxabi completed his BTech with an average mark of 76% and 4 distinctions.

Sihle tells us his story:

"Once again I am humbled and thankful for everything that has come my way so far during my time as a student. It has not been an easy four years of study as I faced so many challenges. The major challenge being finance, at one point being financially excluded because I owed fees from the previous year. I had no money to pay the fees, and my parents did not have the money, so I was forced to borrow. I managed to pay it back with the stipend that I was getting from Kirstenbosch during my in-service training. From then, I never looked back. My desire to achieve, discipline, dedication and determination are what have brought me this far.

I always looked up to Megan Blatchford and I believed that if she could be top of her class 3 times, why can't I do the same? I told myself that I want to leave a mark in CPUT. I did that by dedicating my free time to help my struggling classmates with their studies. I was an unpaid tutor in 2015 until the department could recognise me as an official tutor in 2017. Helping others with their studies has always been my goal and I am doing it out of passion and love. I have learned that money is not a problem if the desire, willingness, hard work and determination are there.

I am now a registered Masters student at CPUT. I again went against all odds and registered without funding. My research topic is: 'Vegetative responses of *Trachyandra ciliata* to different growth substrates and watering regimes in hydroponics'. This plant has nutritional properties and has the potential of being used as vegetables. It can grow in extremely harsh conditions and it tolerates high levels of salinity. This is to address the issue of drought that is hitting the Western Cape by using vegetable crops that do not need a lot of water. This plant can even be watered directly with sea water. This research also contributes to the food insecurity by introducing more vegetable crops in commercial markets for human consumption."

GETTING TO KNOW YOUR COMMITTEE

Isabella Hayden joined the Horticultural Society in May 2009 and was happy to join the committee this year.

She joined the CHS about the time she was moving out of a 33-year long career as a goldsmith and into a new life as a horticulturist. This is her story:

'My mother was a big influence in my interest in plants. She was a keen gardener while I was growing up – one of my earliest memories is one where she squashed a large caterpillar underfoot, squirting caterpillar juice all over the toddler that was me! I don't think that experience really put me off gardening but it was many years later that the gardening bug bit me.

'After I moved to Cape Town in 1992, I spent most of my free time hiking on Table Mountain, the Western Cape mountains and elsewhere in South Africa. It was easy to fall in love with fynbos being so constantly exposed to it, and I had the good fortune of hiking with some very knowledgeable plant lovers. They introduced me to so many beautiful plants and habitats, and infected me with their enthusiasm.

'Through hiking I was drawn into hacking – after the big fires in the year 2000 I joined in the effort to pull out the millions and millions of invasive alien seedlings that sprouted. I have been hacking at Silvermine and on Vlakkenberg on and off since then, and it's still a thrill to see an area of fynbos recovering when aliens have been removed.

'I got my diploma in horticulture from CPUT about five years ago and have been working at Kirstenbosch Garden Centre since then. It's a wonderful place to call "work", and I get to see many of my fellow CHS members there from time to time. I've always enjoyed the CHS outings, and now I'm looking forward to contributing to Horties from the committee's side.'

And we, too, are looking forward to her sharing her expertise with us.

THE "ATH" GARDEN

"In spite of the fact that the Board of the Cape Town Athenaeum NPC had not yet resolved the question of collecting rainwater for use during the dry months, the recent winter rain afforded a chance to begin replanting the Athenaeum garden (a project that has been on the back burner for two years).

July 2016 – front bed, parking area side

July 2018

June 2018 – side of the house

We had intended to use about half a dozen species of plant which are abundant in my garden (like two sorts of wild iris, *Tulbaghia* , *Aloes*, Spekboom) just to fill the existing borders, which were empty except for a few *Abelias* which had survived the drought and been kept trimmed. In the event, the first 3 sorts of plant have indeed been used to renew the garden at the side of the house. When it came to the front borders, however, we decided to diversify, as befitting a horticultural society, and include any suitable plant material on offer, indigenous or exotic. "Suitable" here means above all, heat- and drought-tolerant, but also excludes invasive aliens, those with an aggressive root system, and those requiring high maintenance.

Delivery of plant donations

July 2018 – (in progress) right front bed (after)

We have now made good progress and have planted some 50 varieties (see below), including various sizes of shrubs, herbaceous perennials, *Restios*, *Aloes*, succulents and bulbs. The Athenaeum may perhaps be seen as a meeting-place for plants as well as people.

October 2016 – left front bed

July 2018 – left front bed

The CHS extends its thanks to all the members who have made contributions to the supply of plants, and to Krige Trees for the supply of bark mulch."

Plants in the Athenaeum garden as at 14th July 2018 include the following (usually several plants of each):

Abelia grandiflora; *Aloe ciliaris*, *cooperii*, ?*maculata,* 'Krantz aloe'; *Artemesia affra*, *europeana* 'Powys Castle'; *Chasmanthe*; *Chrysanthemoides incana*; *Cistus*, 3 spp; *Coleonema alba, pulchrum*; *Crassula sarmentosa, orbiculata*; *Dietes bicolor, grandiflora*; *Duranta* 'sapphire'; *Eriocephalus africanus* and spp; *Euryops virgineus*; *Felicia filifolia, amelloides, echinata*; *Freylinia tropica*; *Gnidia* spp; *Helichrysum* 3 spp; *Hemerocallis* (day lilies); *Hypoestes aristata* (ribbon bush); *Leonotis leonurus*; *Leucojum*; *Lavendula* (3spp); *Pelargonium fragrans* and 3spp; *Phlomis lanata*; *Podalyria caliptrata*; *Polygala virgata*; *Restio*; *Rhagoda hastata*; *Rosmarinus officinalis* (rosemary); *Salvia Africana lutea, dolomitica, chamelaeagnea*; *Santolina*; *Struthiola dodecandra*; *Tecoma capensis* (yellow Cape honeysuckle); *Tulbaghia violacea* (wild garlic); 'Vygies'spp; *Westringia fruticosa*.

Jane Robertson

ANNUAL PLANT SALE – Message from our Convenor

"It's just over 2 months to our Plant Sale. Could I ask that you buy seedlings (we will reimburse you), pot them up and get them going in time for the plant sale? Please, let's have as much as possible because with all this rain, people are keen to get into the gardens, so let's make as much money as we can – and then (hopefully) we won't have to pay more money next year when we sign up again.

If you need compost, pots or bags, please let me know."

Melanie Stewart

JOURNAL OF A HAPHAZARD GARDENER – JULY / AUGUST 2018

I thought I would concentrate on the Aloe this month because this winter they have seemed more colourful than usual. There are about 130 species native to southern Africa. The plant has obviously enjoyed the rains of winter.

The *Aloe arborescens* in our garden had turned pink due to the stress of the long summer drought. Now it and its near neighbour, the *A. ferox,* greet us with an abundance of warm orange flowers on the cold winter mornings (left). Aloes seem to have withstood the drought particularly well.

We have had our daughter's dog to stay while she was away on holiday, and so we have been on many early morning walks.

We noted many Aloe types in the neighbourhood. This one of three dotted along the pavement brightened up a drab verge (right). Aloes come in all sizes from miniature, like this one from South America on our verge, which has flowered for the first time (below, far left), to 18m in height like the Tree Aloe. The verges on our walks yielded many varieties (below left, centre and right).

It was good to see that apart from the many shades of orange, there is a yellow variety and one that has a yellowy green tip to the flowers.

Because of its waterwise nature there are many hybrids, including this one, in our garden (right).

This plant with spotted leaves *A. greatheadii* has been sitting flowerless for years and so it was interesting to find, in a verge garden, what the flower looks like (below, left and centre).

Two other very handsome aloes are *A. wikensii* (right) in a pot in our garden and this one with branching stems and a creamy coloured flower *A. striata* (top left, page 6).

One of the easiest Aloes to grow from cuttings is the




A. tenuior which I discover had a name change in 2013 and is now called *A. aloiampelos* (above, 2nd from left, centre and right).

I used the following references:

Wilkinson, Jenny *Gardens in the sand*
Plantz Africa (http://pza.sanbi.org/)

DYING BAOBABS

"**Giant African baobab trees die suddenly after thousands of years**

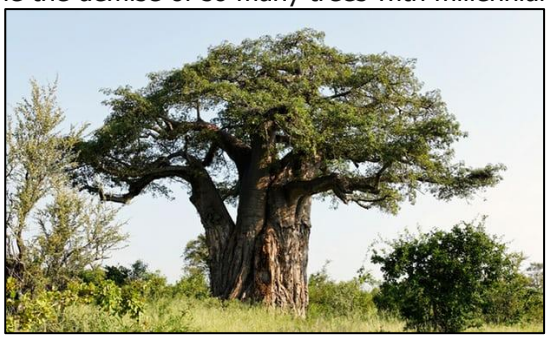
Demise of nine out of 13 of the ancient landmarks linked to climate change by researchers

Some of Africa's oldest and biggest baobab trees have abruptly died, wholly or in part, in the past decade, according to researchers.

The trees, aged between 1,100 and 2,500 years and in some cases as wide as a bus is long, may have fallen victim to climate change, the team speculated.

"We report that nine of the 13 oldest … individuals have died, or at least their oldest parts/stems have collapsed and died, over the past 12 years," they wrote in the scientific journal Nature Plants, describing "an event of an unprecedented magnitude".

"It is definitely shocking and dramatic to experience during our lifetime the demise of so many trees with millennial ages," said the study's co-author Adrian Patrut of the Babeș-Bolyai University in Romania.



Among the nine were four of the largest African baobabs. While the cause of the die-off remains unclear, the researchers "suspect that the demise of monumental baobabs may be associated at least in part with significant modifications of climate conditions that affect southern Africa in particular".

Further research is needed, said the team from Romania, South Africa and the United States, "to support or refute this supposition".

Between 2005 and 2017, the researchers probed and dated "practically all known very large and potentially old" African baobabs – more than 60 individuals in all. Collating data on girth, height, wood volume and age, they noted the "unexpected and intriguing fact" that most of the very oldest and biggest trees died during the study period. All were in southern Africa – Zimbabwe, Namibia, South Africa, Botswana, and Zambia.

The baobab is the biggest and longest-living flowering tree, according to the research team. It is found naturally in Africa's savannah region and outside the continent in tropical areas to which it was introduced. It is a strange-looking plant, with branches resembling gnarled roots reaching for the sky, giving it an upside-down look.

The iconic tree can live to be 3,000 years old, according to the website of the Kruger National Park in South Africa, a natural baobab habitat.

The tree serves as a massive store of water, and bears fruit that feeds animals and humans. Its leaves are boiled and eaten as an accompaniment similar to spinach, or used to make traditional medicines, while the bark is pounded and woven into rope, baskets, cloth and waterproof hats.

The purpose of the study was to learn how the trees become so enormous. The researchers used radiocarbon dating to analyse samples taken from different parts of each tree's trunk. They found that the trunk of the baobab grows from not one but multiple core stems. According to the Kruger Park, baobabs are "very difficult to kill".

"They can be burnt, or stripped of their bark, and they will just form new bark and carry on growing," it states. "When they do die, they simply rot from the inside and suddenly collapse, leaving a heap of fibres."

Of the 10 trees listed by the study authors, four died completely, meaning all their multiple stems toppled and died together, while the others suffered the death of one or several parts.

The oldest tree by far, of which all the stems collapsed in 2010/11, was the Panke tree in Zimbabwe, estimated to have existed for 2,500 years. The biggest, dubbed Holboom, was from Namibia. It stood 30.2 metres (99 feet) tall and had a girth of 35.1 m."

Source:

https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jun/11/giant-african-baobab-trees-die-suddenly-after-thousands-of-years?

NEW PARTNERS FOR MEDITERRANEAN GARDENING INTERNATIONAL

Firstly, I appear to have omitted welcoming our South American partners last year. My apologies to **Mediterranean Gardening Chile** (MGC) for this oversight.

"Mediterranean Gardening Chile originated in Aurora Park, located in the Curacaví valley which lies between the scrubland and Sclerophyllus forest.

Our group fosters interest in its native Mediterranean species, many vulnerable and most endemic, to protect them through observation and knowledge, and to report on their qualities and on the benefits of growing them in our gardens.

Chile's Mediterranean climate floristic region is a world biodiversity hotspot, with about 2,400 endemic plants. Our Mediterranean-type ecosystems are located between latitude 32° and 38° South, from the Pacific Ocean to the foothills of the Andes mountains, transitioning from the semi-desert in the north to the southern rainforest.

The valleys of the coastal range preserve the most characteristic formations that can be described broadly as a largely open heath shrubland, a low, Sclerophyllous forest, and an open savanna-like biome dominated by Acacia caven (thorn trees) apparently resulting from degradation of the forest by the activity of humans and introduced herbivorous mammals."

Visit https://medgardenchile.wixsite.com/mg-chile to find out more about the activities of MGC.

And, secondly, we welcome a seventh partner who has recently joined MGi. **California Horticultural Society** has the same aims and objectives as us. Here is a little bit of how they got started:

"*Affectionately known as 'Cal Hort' to its members, the Society is the oldest plant association in California. The exceptionally cold winter of 1932 brought together nursery personnel, academics, and garden enthusiasts to share information on what plants had survived and what had perished as a result of those temperatures in the San Francisco Bay Area. That initial gathering expanded into the California Horticultural Society, with a focus on understanding the challenges and opportunities of gardening in this region, and on the plants that would thrive in our version of a mediterranean-type climate, which is so different from our East Coast, the UK, and much of Europe. Our mission continues to be to discover those plants that thrive here and by what means.*

To that end, Cal Hort members meet monthly to hear programs by horticultural professionals, plant collectors, and avid gardeners with relevant information to share. In addition, we hold a yearly exchange of seeds, organize visits to gardens and nurseries of interest, and facilitate social visits to one another's gardens.

Since 1933 we've been dedicated to bringing together gardeners & garden professionals, through meetings and other events, to share their experiences. If you are an affiliated MGi member and wish to contact Cal Hort, please do so at this email: calhort.mgi@gmail.com." Visit https://calhortsociety.org/ for more information.

To refresh your memory, these are the other members of MGi: UK, France, Portugal and Western Australia.

DROUGHT-PROOFING UK GARDENS

Excerpt from:

https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/07/20/rhs-hire-water-specialist-teach-british-gardeners-drought-proof/?WT.mc_id=tmg_share_em

"RHS to hire 'water specialist' to teach British gardeners to 'drought-proof' their gardens during hot summers

The Royal Horticultural Society is hiring a "water specialist" to teach British gardeners to "drought-proof" their gardens during hot summers.

Questions from desperate gardeners asking how to save their dry gardens increased by 26 per cent this year, with the organisation expecting this number to rocket as the hot summer continues and gardens feeling the full force of the drought.

To minimise the impact of heatwaves on gardens, the RHS is working with Cranfield University to recruit and train the UK's first garden water scientist. … …

Traditional British plants under threat from increasingly hot summers include sweet peas, which have a weak root system that goes fragile and grey without enough water. Gardeners are currently finding their sweet peas only have one flower on each stem instead of three.

Other flowers which will suffer include dahlias, which require a good watering to flower, and delphiniums, which can be impacted by mildew which is exacerbated by drought.

In vegetable patches across Britain, onion crops will be light and the bulbs very small meaning they are very hard to peel and not much use, and garden peas won't set pod if they're dry, and leafy greens such as spinach and lettuce suffer without moisture.

The chief horticulturalist at the RHS, Guy Barter, told The Telegraph: "Plants use energy to extract water from the soil, and the drier the soil the more energy used, which slows the growth of the plant until it can barely extract anymore water. The plant then closes down, goes dormant or sheds its leaves and possibly perishes. However it is not just about hurling water willy-nilly on the garden. This would be expensive in water and irrigation equipment and not good environmental practice.

"Happily, science comes to the aid of gardeners because the water status of both plants and soil can be measured and irrigation protocols developed to get what the grower needs from the plant, whether foliage, flowers or edible produce, with the most efficient use of water, time and work. This is well worked out for commercial crops such as sugar beet, potatoes and apples but applying this on a garden scale requires more work. For garden plants, being of little commercial importance, we are still in the irrigation dark ages so to speak, and there is enormous scope to produce scientific guidance in watering for gardeners." … …

"However, some plants are thriving in the extra heat. Herbs in particular will positively revel in the Mediterranean summer conditions, many having originated from this region. Fennel, basil, rosemary and sage are all growing like rockets. Ornamental flowers from this region like *Ricinus* will grow happily, as well as many South African species including *Kniphofia*. Other drought tolerant plants like *Verbena bonariensis*, Sedums and *Calamagrostis* x *acutiflora* 'Karl Foerster' mean no garden need be without colour despite the extreme weather we're experiencing."

ITEMS OF INTEREST

- **A Memorial Gathering** will be held on 2nd August at 2pm, at the R Saunders Trust Property, Brackenfell (Smallholding, 31/222 Kruis St, Brackenfell. -33.898315,18.713790), to remember Rod and Rachel. To share memories and to celebrate the richness of what they brought to and left in the world, RSVP to **andy.frontierlab@gmail.com** by 27th July 2018. The full invitation can be requested from Glenda.
- **Sat, 22 – Mon, 24 Sept**: Calitzdorp's Vetplantfees 2018 – talks, walks, workshops (some of which require advanced booking and payment), exhibitions and plant sales are all on offer. Visit www.vetplant.co.za
- **Tree feller**: If you are in need of a tree feller, Carel Roux of Roux Sellers comes highly recommended. His cousin, Michael Grendon, known to some, has re-located to NZ and Carel has taken on his tree-felling team. Contact him on 082-368-2283 or 076-339-8066.

Photos taken and supplied by: Andrew Thorpe, Jenny Scarr, Isabella Hayden, Google, Alamy, Peter Henshall, Jane Robertson, Jean Fillis and Glenda Thorpe