

viranatura 
tours

SPRING IN THE CAPE
SEPTEMBER 2023

Ixia latifolia & Moraea flaccida

© Christopher Gardner (2023)

Day 1 Arrival in Cape Town 13 September

I arrived in the early afternoon and met up with Mayur then Robert and Laura shortly after that. There was still enough light in the day for a quick foray to a local area with one of the few remaining patches of Cape flats renosterveld vegetation. As in introduction to South Africa's burgeoning flora it was ideal, since the species came as a steady stream rather than the delude to come. Even driving in we could see thousands of white *Sparaxis bulbifera* filling grasslands. Closer examination found deep pink *Romulea rosea*, the diminutive yellow *Moraea lewisii*, the golden *Baeometra uniflora* (a member of the Colchicaceae) the flowers reddish on the reverse, a feature shared by a good number of bulbs in this region (red is poorly seen by insects and thus the flowers go unmolested during the day, typically opening in the late afternoon for specific pollinators). The unusual blue flowering brassica; was also quite common and blue was a feature of another very special plant that is now only found here and one other place in the world; *Moraea aristata*. We were lucky and had caught the last specimen in bloom, with two lovely white flowers embellished with deep blue-violet markings on the lip. Elsewhere in the grassland were colonies of the fragrant green orchid *Satyrium odorum*, robust if not exactly beautiful and next to these was *Cyphia bulbosa*, a somewhat atypical non-climbing member of the genus. Some fine shrubs followed in a sandier patch (more akin to fynbos with a marked shift in species) with some good flowering shrubs of *Protea scolymocephala* next to the rare *Serruria aemula* and *Leucodendron floridum*. the light was fading fast and we just had time to make it across to a patch of lilac-blue *Babiana fragrans* in full flower and a final woody offering; *Leucodendron floridum* with markedly different male and female plants (as is typical for this dioecious genus).

Tasty thin crust pizzas were a welcome dinner after the grim food on Ethiopian Airways!

Day 2 To Nieuwoudtville

Day one saw us driving north leaving the morning rain behind. We stopped beside a rocky bank with *Sparaxis grandiflora* (yellow form), *Cyanella hyacinthoides*, slender spikes of *Wurmbea elongata*, white *Bulbinella cauda-felis*



Protea scolymocephala

and the first colourful *Gladiolus venustus*. A chance meeting with passing citrus farmer followed. He was keen on wild flowers and was responsible for managing a large tract of mountain fynbos. He told us about a good road up to the ridge, but before we could set off he took us into his orchards where we got to fill bags with free oranges. He seemed intent on giving us mandarins too, so we drove down to the large factory area, picked three bags of delicious, juicy mandarins had a quick look at the slick packing shed operation and then finally set off looking for flowers, stopping first for some fine *Laperousia fabricii* and superb blue forms of *Ferraria uncinata*.

The road climbed a bit higher, but we didn't as the roadside slopes were smothered in colourful flowers with *Moraea miniata* and similarly coloured, but very different shaped *M. gawleri* growing with long-spurred *Diascia whiteheadii*, violet *Sparaxis metlerkampiae*, fine patches of *Wurmbea elongata* and palest blue-white *Lachenalia unifolia* all knitted together with masses of *Hemimeris racemosa*. Beyond this display the habitat quickly shifted to fynbos with a wide variety of shrubs including *Leucodendron pubescens*, occasional *Podalyria* sp buried beneath masses of pink flowers, and there were the pleasant fussy tufts of *Paranomus bracteolaris*, sweet scented shrublets of *Selago frutescens*, blue *Salvia africa-caerulea*, pendant *Wiborgia obcordata* and *Leucospermum calligerum*. An open patch had a few lovely deep pink *Ixia scillaris* and lilac *Babiana mucronata*. There were great views out across the rugged Cederberg too.

Time was moving on (thanks to our orange-picking diversion) and we still had another good road explore. Along here a rocky slopes held large numbers of *Wachendorfia paniculata* with pretty *Nemesia ligulata* and spotted-leaved *Lachenalia elegans*, whilst our final stop had *Cyanella orchidiformis*, a fine colony of *Conophytum obcordellum*, *Babiana sinuata* and another *Nemesia* sp. We now had to high tail it to Nieuwoudtville and were running late for dinner, but in the end we made up some time and arrived about



Ferraria uncinata



Lachenalia zebrina

fifteen minutes late, enjoying a fine sunset across the escarpment as we drove.

The stars were twinkling and abundant in the clear night sky, boding well for the next day.

Day 3 Nieuwoudtville – Chapter 1

So much for starlight. Overnight, a front had rolled in and it was grey, drizzling and overcast as we drove for breakfast. Chatting to our hostess she told us of some good plant spots and even showed us some *Gladiolus scullyi* near the farm house. We drove out a bit further, through renosterveld coloured by many flowers, though the abundant daisies were still closed on such a cool morning. No matter, we found what we went for; *Gladiolus orchidiformis* and the bonus of a few stunning *G. speciosus* growing near drifts of snow white *Polycarena batteniana* and a few mauve *Babiana framesii*. It seemed a good idea to head away from the rough weather so we drove out to the nearby waterfall, where there was, unsurprisingly, plenty of water flowing this year. In the sandy ground *Sparaxis jacquinii* was common, the many bushes of *Euphorbia mauritanica* were in flower and stands of *Albuca canadensis* lined the roadside, whilst some nicer specimens of *Gladiolus scullyi* were found and then we enjoyed dramatic waterfall views, with a lone *Euryops speciosissimus* providing an excellent foreground to photographs of main waterfall. Both glossy leaved *Tylecodon paniculatus* and narrow leaved *T. wallichii* were scattered across the karroid vegetation.

We moved to the quiver tree forest, stopping along the way for a wonderful clump of *Gonialoe variegata* with fine spikes of scarlet flowers. Another succulent was the target at the quiver trees and once we had photographed *Codon royenii* and the vivid little *Zaluzianskya violacea* we spent time with three superb *Hoodia gordonii*, each plastered in peculiar brownish-pink saucer flowers. The flowers smelt terrible as many such Apocynaceae do, but the setting amidst golden-trunked *Aloidendron dichotoma* was perfect. Another startling plant followed on the return; the impressive *Lachenalia zebrina*, with a good number along the roadside with perfect spikes of creamy flowers above beautifully striped and patterned leaves. Here and there were *Moraea filicaulis* too. The weather ahead looked grim and indeed only got worse as we

neared the town. A brief look at *Sparaxis elegans* was wet and pointless in the rain so there was nothing else for it but to head for hot chocolate in the town.

Day 4 Nieuwoudtville – Chapter 2

A slight improvement in the weather (it had stopped raining) with blue patches appearing among the clouds. A cold wind still blew and it was essentially this that still prevented the multitude of daisies and bulbs from opening. A revised plan had us exploring local areas for those flowers that would open, namely *Ferraria variabilis*, which we found in an area of rocks and sand flats. Alongside, were some very nice *Gladiolus speciosus* and lots of *Lachenalia suaveolens*, fine spikes of *Pterygodium ingeanum* and a few *Babiana framesii*. A patch of white *Drosera cistiflora* was also found and driving out we stopped again for some even better *Gladiolus speciosus*. Just outside of town the land rose a little around dolerite kopies. The flora here was different and among the rocks we found big stands of *Albuca canadensis*, yellow *A. suaveolens*, as well as the yellow of *Cyanella lutea*. The handsome rosettes and pineapple-like heads of *Eucomis regia* were among the rocks and greyish-leaved bushes of *Hermannia johanssenii* were decorated with dainty yellow flowers. There were orchids too with pretty white *Pterygodium scheilpii* common on the edge of shrubs and a few larger *P. hallei* were also found. On the way down we found more good *Gladiolus scullyi* and then very nice *Babiana framesii* in the rocks crevices.

There was time to head for an area of sandstone rock sheet where we immediately found new plants with the graceful *Nemesia cheilanthus*, several pink *Satyrium erectum* and in the lee of some rocks was the dainty *Holothrix secunda*, orange *Ornithogalum maculatum* and lots of fine *Lachenalia membranacea* together with *L. pallida*. A second orchid; *Holothrix aspera* was also found in good condition tucked under the shrubs. On the way back we stopped for a yellow duo with *Babiana vanzijle* and tall *Bulbinella nutans* in a marshy flush.

Day 5 Nieuwoudtville – Chapter 3

5



Gladiolus speciosus

A perfectly clear blue sky set us up for a dense and exhilarating floral feast. Unfortunately, we had to try and condense our planned two day tour into one day, but nonetheless managed. After a final, huge breakfast we set off to the same area we visited yesterday, but this time we were greeted by countless bright-coloured daisies with the huge orange flowers of *Arctotis acaulis*, masses of yellow *Ursinia cakilifolia*, larger whitish yellow *Arctotheca calendula* and orangey *Ursinia calendulifolia*. the smaller but brilliant *Gorteria diffusa* also opened during the time we were there, busying ourselves with photos of riotous combinations. Dainty *Nemesia cheilanthus* and *N. ligulata* were laced throughout. Moving on we drove to another area passing vast spreads of orange and yellow daisies that completely covered the roadside and fields way into the distance. Our next target was a very special plant that grew along a water channel, the stunning *Sparaxis tricolor*. A magnificent clump was found poised by the water and there were a good number of others scattered along the rocky shore along with fine clumps of purple *Babiana framesii*. On the opposite side the grasslands were swathed in daisies including the blue of *Felicia australis*. We drove on a bit further, stopping next in another jaw-dropping area with hundreds of gorgeous *Sparaxis elegans* white form. Mixed with these was the deep blue of *Geissorhiza splendidissima* and orange *Gorteria diffusa*. It was difficult to leave these lovelies, but onwards we had to go, at least until we reached the next blaze of colour where pink *Hesperantha pauciflora* combined with a multitude of daisies, *Romulea hirta* and countless rich red-purple *Laperousia jacquinii*.

Heads in a spin we moved on, the sudden muted greens and brown of the roadside a relief from the colour overload. This did not last long. At the Hantam reserve we walked into a large protected tract of renosterveld and though a little calm at first we soon encountered increasing numbers of *Geissorhiza splendidissima* and then the fabulous *Sparaxis elegans*. By the time we left the vast numbers of ivory *Hesperantha bachmanii* had opened along with pure white (and red reverse) *H. cucullata*, dressing the low shrubs and gaps in between in a frosting of white. Salmon-pink *Moraea bifida* was common throughout.

There was still time to visit a final *Sparaxis elegans* population (with slightly different markings) which grew in abundance along a track together with the slender stems of bluish *S. rapunculoides*. then it was time to move on descending



Geissorhiza splendidissima & Sparaxis elegans

from the plateau with the soft evening light colouring the tablelands.

Day 6 To Langebaan

A day of rare endemic bulbs with plenty of other delights thrown in. Driving south from Clanwilliam we headed to an area of remnant renosterveld patches surrounded by vast tracts of farmland with scrub covered rugged hills beyond. Blue cranes were displaying in the fields and as we approached the first location, a pair of (normally nocturnal) bat-eared foxes stared at us and then dashed for cover. This being a big year for bulbs meant we found some species in a quantity not normally seen. Crossing a damp flat with lots of *Lachnaelia pallida* we reached a slope where we almost immediately found our first mauve and white *Babiana inclinata*. A great many more were to follow, scattered across the hillside, sometimes in loose drifts or mixed very attractively with *Indigofera incana* and a fair smattering of white *Geissorhiza tulbaghensis*. It was a stunning display and it took some time to traverse the hillside also seeing on the way a few lovely *Moraea villosa* with their distinctive metallic-blue markings. It was a second much rarer species we were after and these were to be found on an adjacent patch; *Moraea gigandra* which here were growing together with *M. villosa*. A fine duo of striking bulbs. As ever time was moving on so we walked back to the vehicle finding a fine display of pink mesembs on the way. Driving out there was the bonus of an unparalleled view of a secretary bird stalking across the open field. We stopped the car and the bird continued to walk towards us eventually passing twenty metres behind the car and continuing its determined prowling.

After a revitalising coffee stop, we continued to the next location, stopping (as always) on the way for a stunning and visually dazzling population of 'mesembs' with bushes of intense pink *Lampranthus* sp growing with paler pink *Drosanthemum* or *Lampranthus*. Aizoiceae are very difficult to identify. Reaching the coast, we found a suitable place to park and enjoyed the obvious and plentiful red *Babiana hirsuta* that grew in the dunes by the hundreds, the display extending along the kilometres of dune and beach. It was a fascinating matrix of red babianas, the large leaves of *Brunsvigia orientalis* and *Trachyandra muricatus* with quite a few sombre *Ferraria foliosa* thrown in and a few hefty *Euphorbia caput-medusae* that sprawling across the sands in reptilian



Babiana hirsuta

fashion, some bearing dense heads of flowers. A bizarre long-proboscis fly was photographed pollinating a flower.

The beach swept up the coast and on and on.

There was a brief stop for a drift or two of *Lachenalia mathewsii* that filled the damp depressions in a field and then we carried onto a rare area of limestone rocks. Among the scrub were more endemics primarily the rare *Moraea calcicola* and we eventually found a number in an open area together with *Ixia purpureorosea* and a fine *Babiana tubiflora* with red-marked cream flowers and very long tubes (pollinated by long-proboscis flies). It took a while to leave as we kept finding more things such as peachy *Moraea flaccida*, a floriferous *Pteronia* shrub, red *Pelargonium fulgidum* and more babiana.

A good seafood restaurant was a perfect end to the day.

Day 7 Darling

It was overcast as the spring time weather continued (sun one day, rain the next) but all of the extra rain this year had meant masses of flowers. We drove to Darling and stopped at the first of four productive renosterveld reserves. Here we quickly found *Moraea belledeni* with speckled yellow flowers held on tall stems, *Babiana tubulosa*, *Ixia erubescens* and then as we progressed slowly the large brownish-centred white flowers of *Ixia abbreviata*, black-purple *Wurmbea marginata* and fine clumps of blue *Aristea africana*. The orchid *Pterygodium cathayanum* was also common throughout and the smaller *Pterygodium alatum* was also found. Heavy drizzle swept through from time to time, but we managed to photograph most of the best plants except *Geissorhiza monanthos*, which had yet to open.

At the next location the marshy ground was liberally sprinkled with (unopened) *Geissorhiza radians* by the hundreds, mixed with white *Ornithogalum thyrsoides* (a plant that we had seen in patches and drifts in many places as we drove) and *Sparaxis bulbifera*. Greenish *Disperis villosa* was found before we searched another area with lots of *Drosera cistiflora* (white form) and the big stars of *Pauridium capensis*, the white flowers embellished with bluish centres. With



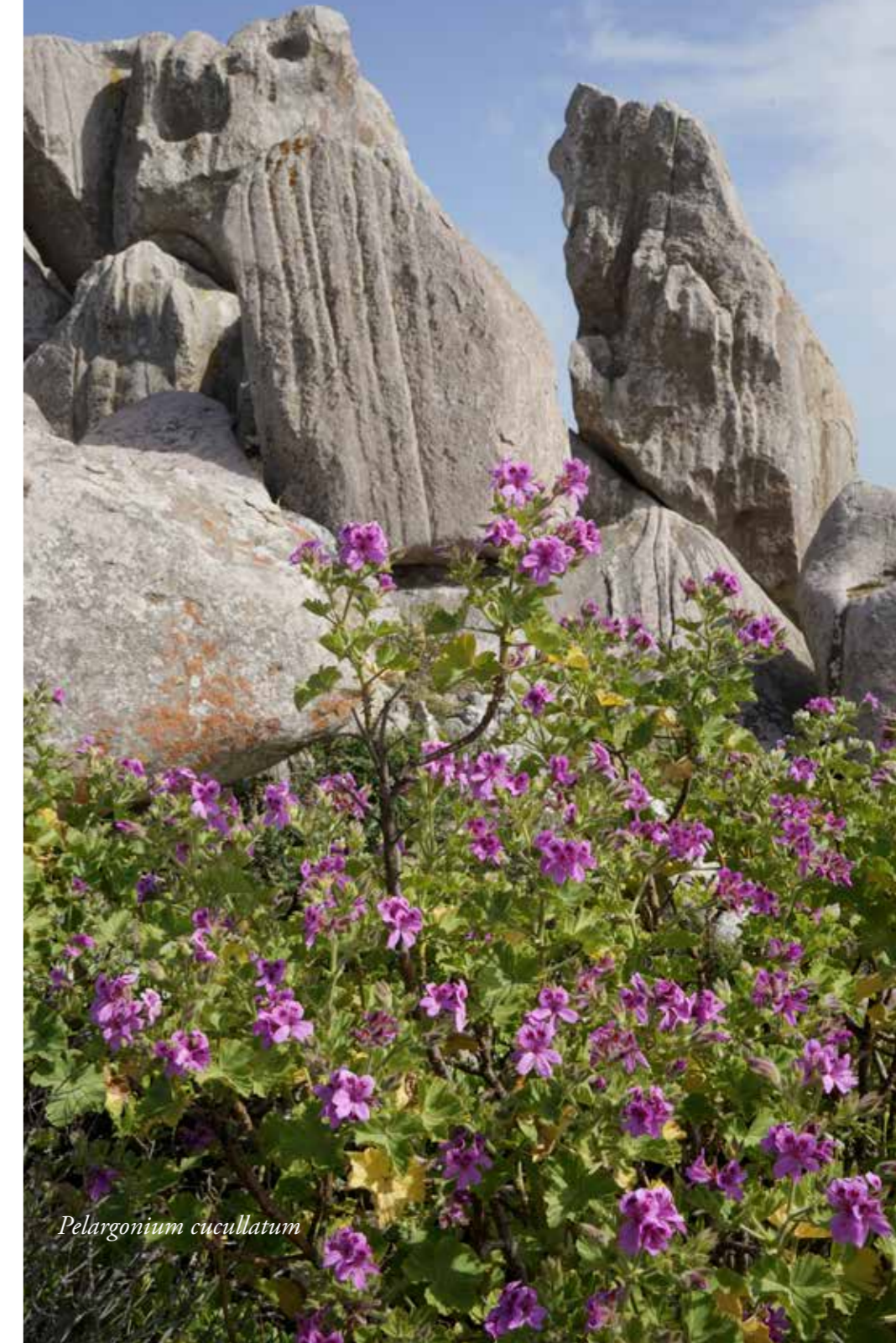
Zantedeschia aethiopica

luck the abundant *Romulea eximia* would open later, so for the time being we spent time looking at *Gladiolus metliuscus* and airy stands of *Heliophila coronopifolia*. There was the bonus of two cute parrot-billed tortoises nestled at the base of a shrub. Our next site had more of the same as well as lots of golden *Ixia maculata*, the geissorhiza mimic; *Babiana rubrocyanea*, oceans of orange-yellow *Ursinia anthemoides* daisies in the grasslands and big drifts of hundreds of *Zantedeschia aethiopica* stretching up through the marsh.

We decided to buy some lunch supplies back in town and give the flowers a chance to open (it was brightening a little). This worked out well enough, as by the time we returned in an hour the lovely *Romulea eximia* had opened and were now crowding thickly the marshes and paths making it near on impossible to walk among them. The stunning violet and pink *Geissorhiza radians* had also begun to open making it hard to decide where to start. Sadly, the weather closed in again after a while, so we opted to try and fourth reserve. Here we found the deep violet *Babiana angustifolia*, brownish form of *Moraea tripetala*, lots of *Wachendorfia paniculata* and *Lachenalia unifolia* as well as the marbled unopened buds of *Monsonia speciosa* and *Ixia maculata*. Three snipe were flushed from the marshes as we explored. With the inclement weather continuing we drove to the coast and searched an area with big stands of *Watsonia meriniana* and then onto the rocky clifftops where big breakers were roaring in and creating thick beds of foam on the shore. Bulbs are everywhere in South Africa and even searching the rough ground next to the hotel produced a good population of pristine *Gladiolus alatus* and *Moraea fugax*.

Day 8 West Coast NP

Fine weather was with us all day today, which began with a drive to and then through West Coast National Park, passing through beautiful coastal scenery as the multitude of daisies began to open in a kaleidoscope of colours. A pair of ostriches were seen very close and then we found the stout spikes of *Pterygodium hallei* on the way to some interesting granite rocks with many shapes and eroded forms, among which nestled many interesting plants. The fiery red of *Pelargonium fulgidum* was common and



Pelargonium cucullatum

tucked away beneath were *Babiana tubulosa*. Also thriving among the rocks and valleys between were large floriferous plants of *Pelargonium cucullatum*, some positioned with superb coastal backdrops. A tall *Ferraria crispa* almost went unnoticed at the same spot. Driving a little further on there were some superb displays of flowers including the vivid orange *Arctotis hirsuta*, pink *Senecio arenarius* *elegans* and masses of *Oxalis pres-capre* stretching away to the sweeping bays and rock outcrops below, in places punctuated by stands of *Pterygodium orobanchoides*. Further on and we saw a solitary bontebok resting among the flowers and there were big drifts of various species as we drove (but sadly could not stop and get out). We were able to disembark and enjoy a stretch of rocky coast with powerful waves rolling in, backed by a dense display of *Didelta carnosus*. It was hard for botanists to resist stopping for nice things (despite park rules and the fairly busy road) and we couldn't manage it, stopping for some trailing *Grielim humifusum* and a stand of tall *Ferraria crispa* (which caused a traffic jam of sorts). A second smash and grab raid was carried out on big drifts of *Arctotis stoechadifolia* that smothered the sands.

There was the chance for a longer break and walk into the dunes a few kilometres on. Here we found the stunning big orange *Gazania krebsiana*, yellow *Crassula dichotoma*, pale orange *Ursinia* sp, *Nemesia bicornis*, *Euphorbia caput-medusae*, lots more *Grielim humifusum* and the twining *Cynanchum africanum*. Unfortunately, the only *Hyobanche sanguinea* we could find were not quite ready. As we ate lunch a big snake was coiled sunning itself just below our picnic spot.

Since yesterday had been so rain affected, it seemed a good idea to revisit at least some of the areas and we drove onto Darling and then Wayland Reserve where there were breathtaking drifts of *Geissorhiza radians* in the marshes and drifts of *Romulea eximia* in full flower. An enjoyable hour was spent photographing these lovely flowers before moving on to *Babiana rubrocyanea* and then a pretty mixed drift with; *Ixia maculata*, *Geissorhiza monanthos*, *Gladiolus metliusculus* and diminutive blue *Moraea lugubris*. By 4 o'clock flowers were closing up fast which was a worry so we sped to Tiene Versveld again hoping to see the *Monsonia speciosa* open, but even by 4.15 they had closed up for the day. No matter a few red *Drosera cistiflora* were found (also closed), *Babiana angustifolia* was plentiful and it was a pleasant



Geissorhiza radians

place to wander.

Day 9 Tulbagh

A varied day that included stops in the three main vegetation types; strandveld, renosterveld and fynbos. We began with the first, stopping in an area of deep sands near the coast where we found the remarkable *Babiana ringens*, the inflorescence including a long central stem that projected above the red flowers to allow sunbirds to perch on and feed on nectar below. With these were *Hermannia pinnata*, prostrate *Leucospermum hypophyllocarpodendron*, *Nemesia barbata* and a solitary *Pterygodium crispum*. Moving on to Tulbagh we spent time at a small but valuable reserve there. Under some eucalypts we found golden *Ornithogalum dubia*, lots of an *Albuca* sp and the sumptuous mauve-pink of *Babiana villosa*. This was a nothing compared to the display on a lower slope where hundreds of the latter were mixed with the intense cherry-red of *Geissorhiza erosa* in a beguiling mix. Drifts of *Cyanella lutea* merged from the sides as the display spread among clumps of large grasses. A little further up the slope and the already intense mix went up a notch with the stunning velvety violet of *Sparaxis grandiflora* a gem amongst gems. Sprinkled among these were the delicate pink of *Moraea papilionacea* as a finishing touch.

Leave we must and after a quick bite to eat in the car to regain our now confused (colour) senses we drove onto Ceres and then up towards a pass. The rest of the afternoon was spent slowly wandering a track where we found a great many orchids with many *Satyrium erectum*, greenish to pinkish *S. bicorne*, slender long-spurred *S. humile* and the altogether showier orange-peel or lemon-peel *S. coriifolia* that appeared in some good stands. All species were common throughout. The diminutive *Disa biflora* was also found together with *Pterygodium cathayanum* and *P. alatum*. Colouring the fynbos were stands of an upright heath and abundant *Muraltia* sp, whilst more delicate *Microlooma tenuifolium* twined among the shrubs. Higher up Laura found a superb and pristine *Gladiolus quadrangularis*. The various *Hesperanthal* *Geissorhiza* spp were beginning to open as we walked back down after a fulfilling day in the field.

Day 10 Ceres 22/9



Babiana villosa

The day started well with an area with some good *Moraea villosa*, fine tufts of *Babiana sambucina*, bushy *Pelargonium myrrhifolium* and a smattering of *Gladiolus venustus*. Further out of town as we reached areas of fynbos we stopped for *Babiana lineolata* and *Ixia latifolia*, but really should not have bothered. A large burn that extended for a few kilometres was the main focus of the day and here we were treated to more fabulous flower displays. One area was swathed in hundreds if not thousands of *Babiana lineolata*, these reached after one had walked through rainbow meadows of *Moraea flaccida*, *Ixia latifolia*, countless *Hermannia*, delicate violet *Moraea tripetala* and *Gladiolus venustus*, whilst every burned bush was strung with necklaces of *Cyphia volubilis*. Damper areas had at two *Romulea* with; *rosea* and tiny *tabularis* as well as the remarkably similar-looking *Morea variabilis*. The golden cuplets of *Geissorhiza ornithogaloides* were mingled throughout, forming quite dense patches higher up the slope once we had passed many *Gladiolus quadrangularis*. The mixtures and blends of flowers were mesmerising and it didn't get any easier higher up where even larger drifts of *Moraea et al.* A few *Bulbinella elegans* were poised above another slope and then as we traversed the same slope we found the first of two dozen exquisite *Bartholina burmanniana*. These grew in close proximity to four other species of diminutive orchids; *Disa biflora*, *Disperis bolusiana*, *Pterygodium circumflexa* and *Pterygodium alatus* (which was actually quite abundant). A couple of interestingly-shaped *Gladiolus ceresianus* were also found. After three hours it was time to come down, have a bite to eat and then head to another area. Understandably this was rather low-key by comparison but we still found *Babiana sambucina*, pink *Gladiolus inflatus* and fine large-flowering yellow mesemb (*Phyllobolus* sp).

We then took a minor dirt road back towards town stopping here and there and finding *Ferraria uncinata*, *Gladiolus carinatus* the pretty yellow-flowered shrublet *Roepora fulva* and then at our last stop the fascinating *Protea amplexicaulis*, which formed a large mound of handsome glaucous foliage, among which were hidden the attractive reddish-bracted flowers. More *Gladiolus carinatus* and a large yellow *Moraea* sp. (*ochroleuca*?) were also found before we completed the drive back descending in the valley bottom ringed by rugged sandstone ramparts laced with mists and sunlit patches, all looking inviting and ripe for exploration.

Day 11 To De Hoop



Moraea flaccida & *Babiana lineolata*

A change of scene today as we drove south crossing through areas of karroid scrubland and renosterveld wheatbelt. In Worcester, the Karroo botanical garden had a large adjoining area of intact wild habitat and we took a path up into the rocky hills where we found many architectural *Aloe microstigma* among the scattered shrubs. On the rocks were some interesting succulent including pretty clusters of *Conophytum ficiforme*, the quadrangular leaved *Crassula rupestris*, and *Crassula cotyledonis* all vying for attention in rustic rocky niches. The white spikes of *Haworthia herbacea* were scattered throughout and became quite plentiful higher up. A side track led to an area with more flowers including tumbles of *Indigofera* sp. and white *Pelargonium abrotanifolium* and spikes of white *Bulbinella cauda-felis*. Sulphurous *Sebea exacoides* was also scattered throughout as were numerous bushes of pink *Lampranthus haworthii* and orange *Drosanthemum speciosum*, but they all remained closed on such a cool, overcast day. Luckily, one bush of the stunning latter was opening as we descended.

Moving on we stopped at a hillside with a large population of *Aloe microstigma* scattered among the silvery bushes of *Pteronia incana* and narrow upright stems of *Euphorbia mauritanica*. There were also a couple of dainty *Gladiolus permeabilis*. A short distance further on and we stopped for flowering *Cotyledon orbicularis* and beneath many of the surrounding dwarf shrubs were groups of pretty creamy-flowered *Holothrix secunda*. Shortly after the weather began to close in a heavy drizzly rain rather curtailed any botanising, though fortunately there was little to be seen as we drove through the remaining karoo habitat and onto the vast wheatbelt beyond. The drizzle eased enough for us to photograph an impressive population of *Aloe ferox*. Ditto a colony of *Watsonia aletroides* with tubular scarlet flowers that we found closer to our destination, nestled near the coast at De Hoop.

During our afternoon foray along the coastal strip. A rather uninspiring yellowish *Moraea* sp was common throughout, but the other gems required some searching and with persistence we found bright red *Gladiolus cunonioides*, pink *G. hirsutus*, the tall spires of *Satyrium carneum* and the crowning glory of three huge *Bonatea speciosa* bursting from among the shrubs, the largest 127 centimetres metres tall (and still growing). We had a short walk in the dunes



Aloe microstigma



Tritoniopsis antholyza

to the coast from where we could watch several southern right whales in the ocean (probably twenty but it was hard to tell). There was a lot wildlife on the way back with bontebok, eland, Cape Zebra and many ostriches seen very well, including two displaying males of the latter.

Day 12 De Hoop

The level 9 storm that was bearing down on the coast did not arrive until midday, giving us a short window to revisit the *Bonatea speciosa*, *Satyrium carneum* and have a look at some area of fynbos, but the rain started as we began the latter and after a soggy walk we returned to the lodge for lunch and then spent the rest of the day by the fire in the cottage as the weather raged outside.

Day 13 To Swellendam & Bontebok NP

Thankfully, there was a road still open that allowed us to leave, although the news from around the province was not good, with many roads wiped out and bridges washed away. Twenty-one ostriches were feeding on the lawns in the sunshine as we left, stopping briefly for *Pelargonium hermanniifolium* and *Leucospermum cuneifolium* as we left and made our way to Swellendam where we managed to get into a hotel. It was still raining, but the weather forecast indicated a two hour window of dry between 4 and 6 pm, so we set off for nearby Bontebok NP and spent a dry two hours exploring the area finding *Lobostemon echoides* in good flower, spikes of *Tritoniopsis antholyza*, rather soggy *Watsonia laccata* and then a few yellow *Babiana patula* growing near flowery shrubs of a *Ledbeckia sepiaria*. All too soon it was time to return, but at least we had seen something. Haartebeest and black harrier were seen as we left.

Day 14 Marloth and Tradouw Pass

Finally a rain free day. Having opted to stay in Swellendam another night we transferred to our new guest house and then drove off to the nearby nature reserve. In the grasslands below the tablelands, we immediately found the variably-coloured *Gladiolus liliaceus* and then a large population of *Watsonia laccata*. Among the grasses were also *Babiana patersoniae*(?) and Laura found



Drosanthemum speciosum

Disa bracteata. We then drove onto the Tradouw Pass, stopping beside an extensive area of fynbos with elegant large shrubs of *Psoralea pinnata* laden with bluish flowers and the broad white corymbs of *Berzelia abrotanoides*. Venturing further in we then found the dainty *Gladiolus rogersii* among the *Erica*-filled shrubberies. Glancing further uphill during lunch I noticed the tell-tale red of *Mimetes cucullatus* so we retraced our steps and then went a bit further to find some good flowering shrubs of this characteristic genus. There were more multiflowered *Gladiolus rogersii* too, a tall *Aristea (bakeri?)* and the gangly stems of a tall *Euryops* sp. Moving on and an area with several seeps and waterfalls held a good number of lovely *Gladiolus carneus*, each white or rose-tinged white flowers well marked with red.

The vegetation changed from here as we entered the karoo with lower shrubs and increasing quantities of 'mesembs'. Mats of blue *Lotononis argentea* were found before we stopped for some stunning orange-red mounds of *Drosanthemum speciosum* illuminating the rocky slopes with *Berkheya bracteata* and other pink and white mesembs. We continued to an area we had visited in March with a range of succulents hoping for some new species. There was little new although the inflated fruits of a large shrub *Nymanina capensis* were attractive and there was the large greyish-green succulent *Crassula arborescens* and some good flowering plants of *Cotyledon orbicularis*. Time was moving on and it seemed best to retrace our steps, stopping for more glads and the odd view on the way back.

Day 15 To Cape Town

Our initial plans were to try to visit Fernkloof (and then continue onto Cape Town), but when we arrived at the gates they were closed and later discussions revealed all walking trails in the municipality had been shut because the many landslides that (were clearly evident) scarring the hillsides. Disappointed, there was nothing we could do but head for Cape Town, stopping briefly outside Hermanus for a population of flowering *Protea compacta*. Dropping off our luggage at our guest house we decided to drive to Table Mountain and spend the afternoon up there. Walking to the cable car we passed a couple of floriferous (planted) shrubs of the lovely *Leucospermum cordifolium* and then (wisely) purchased 'fast track' tickets so that we dodged the long queue and were whisked up past the raw sandstone cliffs to the otherworldly tableland. Once the crowds had been left behind (the 400

Leucadendron strobilinum



metres rule applies here) we were able to enjoy the highland fynbos finding the attractive pink everlasting daisy; *Edmondia pinifolia* and the first of many fine flowering plants of *Leucodendron strobilinum* that illuminated the green-brown tones of the fynbos. A few *Satyrium odoratum* were also found, whilst dense clusters and scattered rosettes of *Drosera* spp were common place. There were two contrasting daisies; pink *Mairia crenata* wedged in rock crevices and lanky *Osmitopsis asteriscoides* in marshy seeps were seen too and the views throughout were stunning, rugged and alluring. Reaching the highpoint at Maclear's Beacon (1085m) we had a break and then retraced our steps stopping for many more fine views on the way together with views of sunbirds, a hefty agama and a rock hyrax.

The traffic was rather slow on the return but we made it in reasonable time and pizza with snails as a starter washed down with cold beer sealed the day.

Day 15 Cape Point

A fine blue sky day. We drove directly towards the Cape of Good Hope, entering the national park and continuing to a look out point where we soon found our first colourful *Lachenalia luteola* among the rock crevices along with white *Gessiorhiza ovata*, tufts of *Crassula fascicularis*, trailing stems of *Muraltia saturieoides*, white *Aristea spiralis* and the lovely patterned flowers of *Gladiolus debilis*. A walk along a ridge overlooking the sweeping coast and (today's) calm seas brought the trailing pink proteaceae; *Diastella divaricata*, bushes of golden flowered *Aspalathus capensis* and *Polygala* sp. as well as many lizards including some with colourful blue-green heads and throats.

We continued onto towards Cape Point, stopping before we reached there for some superb large shrubs of *Leucospermum conocarpodendron* that were packed with lemon-yellow flower heads attended by sugarbirds. At the Cape we took a productive walk down finding *Gladiolus cunonioides* in good condition, many low, spiny bushes of *Cullumia squarrosa*, flowery dwarf shrubs of *Roepera flexuosa*, the delicate bicoloured flowers of *Nemesia affinis*, abundant *Senecio* spp. (quite possibly both *elegans* and *arenarius*), and then some good *Ferraria crispa* above a big view of the cliffs. Three ostriches were seen very close up feeding next to the path and fairly unconcerned by us. Robert and I continued further finding

Leucospermum conocarpodendron



more good views, *Ferraria crispa* and *Lessertia frutescens* on the clifftop. The walk back up was not too arduous and we drove on to our next location beside the ocean, enjoying lunch to the sound of gently rolling surf.

Our third walk of the day took us up onto another ridge where we enjoyed the amazing rock formations that punctuated the flowery fynbos, with some incredible contorted and riven sandstone erosion. Big, tree-sized *Mimetes fimbriifolius* were common as were the golden *Aspalathus capensis*, and the ever present *Adenantha villosa*, whilst *Lachenalia luteola* was scattered among the rocks throughout and we also found *Ixia dubia* and more *Gladiolus debilis*. Further along we found the rare endemic shrub *Staavia doddii* too. The overall landscape was superb, with the views out and along the vast coastline and irregular hills. There was also time on the drive out to stop for *Pelargonium cucullatum*, *Mimetes hirsutus* crowding a damp area and neat shrublets of *Serruria villosa*.



Day 16 Silvermine

After visiting Silverhill Seeds for seeds (or course) and books we drove the short distance to Silvermine and took a walk in the rocky fynbos. The trail led up past little streams with *Pauridia serrata* and along the track were increasing quantities of the fine everlasting daisy *Syncarpha speciosissima* and *Gladiolus debilis*. Many small *Drosera trinervia* were scattered in suitable open spots. Following the track up we searched for orchids and other ferny delights in the rock crevices, eventually reaching the higher plateau where many plants of *Protea cynaroides* were scattered among the vigorous tufts of *Tetraria thermalis*, though none were in flower. There was a commanding view of the whole of the bay and most of the surrounding peaks from Table Mountain across to Kogelberg. Following the track down the stands of *Leucadendron* were quite dense, but where the habitat opened out we found two new *Erica*; pink *strumaria* and white *pyxidifolia*. Robert then found a flowering *Protea cynaroides*, before we took a short cut down through the fynbos, reaching a small stream with *Drosera hilaris*. A wider track continued all the way to the car park and along this there was *Pelargonium cucullatum*, *P. capitatum*, a tall long tubed *Erica tubiflora*, lots of blue *Geissorhiza aspera* and the odd *Satyrium bicornis*, whilst *Moraea neglecta* was opening in good quantity.

Lunch was back in the city, before we prepared for our flights home later in the evening after a flower-filled two weeks.

Day 17 Flight home

Such is the way with travel my bags were lost/delayed for the third time in four journeys. Some record. They did turn up after ten days!!

Syncarpha speciosissima

Ursinia calenduliflora



For information on our tours
please contact

info@viranatura.com

Mimulus nanandinus