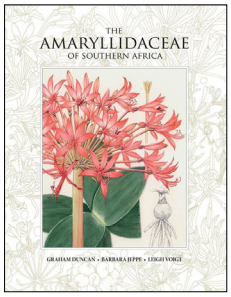
BOOK TITLE:
The Amaryllidaceae of southern Africa



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Uniting botanical science and art

The Amaryllidaceae is a large family of flowering plants, with over 800 species in more than 50 genera, distributed across warm temperate and tropical parts of the world. The largest proportion of species is in South America, but southern Africa is home to approximately 250 species in 18 genera and they are found in a wide range of habitats. The family includes many popular garden plants, such as daffodils, snowdrops and clivias, and vegetables, such as onions, chives and garlic. There are three subfamilies: Agapanthoideae (with the single endemic southern African genus *Agapanthus*), Allioideae (onions and chives) and Amaryllidoideae. This book is dedicated to the Amaryllidoideae, and thus does not include the eight species of *Agapanthus*, nor the approximately 20 species of the African genus *Tulbaghia* (wild garlic).

The bulbs of wild amaryllids were collected by Dutch sailors at the Cape as early as 1603, but the family was only formally described in 1805 by the French naturalist Jean St Hilaire, who named it after Amaryllis, a beautiful maiden who, in Greek mythology, fell in love with the handsome shepherd Alteo, who had a passion for flowers. James G. Baker, Keeper of the Herbarium and Library of the Royal Gardens, Kew, made enormous contributions to the taxonomy of the family in the late 19th century, single-handedly writing the entire text of Volume 6 of the *Flora Capensis* (Haemodoraceae to Liliaceae) in 1896, as well as full descriptions of the family in the *Flora of Tropical Africa* in 1898. During the 20th century, several publications dealing with the southern African Amaryllidaceae appeared, including reviews of *Cyrtanthus* in 1939, *Nerine* in 1967, *Crinum* in 1973 and *Haemanthus* in 1984. All are, of course, now outdated, and a modern review was necessary.

This book brings together the scattered accounts of these species, and provides an up-to-date synthesis of the taxonomy, distinguishing features, distribution, ecology, conservation status and cultivation of 289 taxa (species, subspecies and varieties). The book is arranged in alphabetical order of genera, and there is an introduction to each genus that provides information on its history of discovery, ecology, distribution, and medicinal and poisonous properties. The extensive scientific text was prepared by Graham Duncan, curator of the indigenous bulb collection at the Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden. Duncan has drawn on both his qualifications in botanical taxonomy and extensive experience as a professional horticulturalist to provide a thorough, comprehensive, and highly informative review on the state of our knowledge on these plants.

This hefty book is not, however, only a dry treatise of a plant family – the story of how the book eventually came about is, itself, intriguing. The book owes its existence to Barbara Jeppe and Leigh Voigt, a mother-and-daughter team of artists who together spent 45 years collecting and illustrating individual species. The art of accurately illustrating plant specimens has been vital to botanical science for centuries. Before modern photography, and particularly recently digital photography, it was a necessary aspect of botany that took time, patience and great skill. In 1972, botanical artist Barbara Jeppe began to paint the various *Nerine* and *Haemanthus* species near her home at Lake Sibaya, initiating a collection of paintings of the amaryllids of the area. Later this collection was supplemented with species from as far afield as the Western Cape and the Richtersveld, and, over time, she conceived the idea of illustrating a complete work on the family. The process of accurate rendering was time-consuming, often requiring visits to remote sites to get access to fresh material, with multiple trips required to each site to depict the leaves and flowers which do not appear simultaneously. When it became apparent to Barbara that she would not be able to finish the task in her lifetime, her daughter Leigh Voigt, also an accomplished botanical artist, promised to complete the work. Over the next 16 years, Leigh set about filling in the gaps, often having to fly to wherever a new species had been found in order to paint it in situ. Following the completion of the plates, Graham Duncan spent a further 2 years drafting the text.

The final product, a sizeable book of over 700 pages, is illustrated with 248 full-page colour plates and a distribution map for each species. Not every taxon is illustrated with a colour plate, and one or two have more than one plate, but the coverage is close to comprehensive. In addition, the book has over 120 informative colour photographs of the plants flowering in their natural habitats. The originals for all of the painted plates were purchased by Louis Norval, and now form part of the Homestead Art Collection housed at the Norval Foundation in Cape Town.

By combining traditional botanical art with outstanding photography, this book, published by Umdaus Press, sets a new standard for botanical publishing in southern Africa. Although not a book to be taken easily into the field as an identification guide, it will have wide appeal to professional botanists and conservationists, as well as those with an interest in growing the many amaryllid species. I also have no doubt that, in time, this publication will become one of the most collectable texts in the field of botanical Africana.