

Foreword

The art of botanical illustration is an ancient one; a genre that is still as valid today as a means of creating diagnostic, identifying portraits of plant species, even in the face of the extraordinary technical developments in modern photography. But it has one drawback. Scientific botanical art is a slow painstaking process. To complete the portrait of a species can take days, weeks or, in the case of amaryllids, usually a year or more as the artist waits for the development of all its life stages to appear – leaves, flowers, fruits and seeds in their due season, so completing its annual life history. Then too, at peak flowering periods, such as in autumn when the majority tend to flower, the artist has perforce to focus on a handful of species, leaving the rest to be painted in succeeding years. (Photography has much lesser time constraints.) These are just some of the obstacles that faced Barbara Jeppe in 1971 when she embarked on her life's ambition to paint all known South African Amaryllidaceae.

Completing the task has been akin to the labour of Sisyphus, an unfortunate character in Greek mythology who was condemned for eternity to roll a great rock to the top of a mountain, whereupon, on nearing the summit, the rock rolled back to the bottom and the benighted Sisyphus had to begin again. So it has been with this book. Even in Barbara's lifetime there were setbacks that seemed terminal yet the resolve to start again, to continue and to attain completion, merely grew stronger. After Barbara's death in 1999, her artist daughter Leigh Voigt took up the challenge to finish the task. With unbounded determination and energy, she produced further artworks of newly discovered and previously unaccounted for species over the next 16 years, bringing the project as close to finality as will ever be feasible. Now after a gestation of 45 years *The Amaryllidaceae of Southern Africa* is about to be born.

With 18 genera and at least 240 species, southern Africa is the second most important centre of diversity for the Amaryllis family after South America. Equally importantly, an inordinately large number of local species are highly desirable horticulturally, sought after by gardeners worldwide. This comprehensive book – the first of its kind – will be welcomed by all horticulturists and botanists who have long been waiting for an authoritative reference work to this hugely appealing group of geophytes.

Graham Duncan's impeccable text complements the artwork perfectly. Over the best part of a working lifetime at Kirstenbosch, he has studied and cultivated most of the species enumerated here, acquiring a deep knowledge of their particular horticultural needs, here distilled into practical advice. Not since the Hon. William Herbert's classic treatise, *Amaryllidaceae* (London, 1837), have the South African species of this family been treated by an author who is both a horticulturist and a botanist and who knows them so well from both perspectives. The result is a comprehensive, richly referenced authoritative account of each species, reflecting current taxonomic viewpoints and distribution data, set against pertinent background historical records.

Here then is a magisterial reference work on one of the most charismatic plant families in our region. Inevitably, scientific texts have to be brought up to date with the passage of time yet this beautiful publication is unlikely to be superseded for decades. The plates will remain a delight for ever.

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