# Foreword

## Book Section

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The history of the Bushman Candles goes back to the dawn of botanical exploration in southern Africa. The first published image of these plants dates from Johannes Burman in 1738, but that, confusingly, appears to show two different species in the single engraving! Somewhat later, William Paterson (1789) and Charles L'Héritier de Brutelle (1792) both published engravings representing distinct species still currently recognised today. These wonderful early works of botanical art are reproduced in this new publication, demonstrating a fundamental theme: that the study of plants and their visualisation are complementary, symbiotic activities, each being intimately dependent on the other.

Much later, the renowned South African botanist and explorer Rudolf Marloth wrote on *Sarcocaulon* in his magnificently extravagant work *The Flora of South Africa* (Vol. 2, 1925):

> "In its flowers this is nearly allied to *Geranium*, hence it was formerly included in that genus, e.g. by Burchell, but the plants have a very different habit. The stems are swollen and to some extent succulent, but covered with a thick cortex of special structure. This consists of numerous layers of compressed cork-cells, which are impregnated with resin and wax, thus forming an impermeable cylinder around the living tissues of stem and branches. Every year a new set of cork-cells is added to this mantle from within, which thus attains a considerable thickness in course of time. The quantity of resin and wax in it is so large that plants taken directly from the soil will burn like a torch, hence the name *candle bush* for *S. burmanni* [*Monsonia* species uncertain] (Karoo and Namaqualand) or *bushman's candle* for *S. rigidum* [*M. patersonii*] (Great Namaqualand).
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> The existence of such an ample vegetation in an almost rainless country (in some years less than one inch of rain) … is a puzzle to the visitor arriving there in summer. There seems to be no trace of moisture in the sandy soil, and the violent sand storms which often rage for weeks without interruption would appear to render vegetable life impossible. Yet, there they are – hundreds, nay thousands of shrublets within sight, and not one kind only, but ten or twenty or more species associated together on sand or rock. All dormant now but alive within their well protected exterior. In winter, however, conditions of life are different, for although there is barely any rain in some years, in others there may be several inches within a few weeks. But even the nearly rainless winters are not dry in the coastal belt, for every night fogs from the sea carry ample moisture many miles inland and often damp the ground to a depth of five inches, or more where sloping rocks act as an additional catchment area."

Marloth's book is a wonderful work but far, far more than a traditional flora: it includes beautiful colour plates and a considerable amount of ecological information, as the above extract exemplifies. He was familiar with the Bushman Candles and indeed a new species, commemorated in the name *Monsonia marlothii*, was first collected by him in the present day Namibia. Above he has described eloquently what makes these plants unique. Most distinctive of all is their structure: swollen, fleshy, spiny shrublets that are archetypal succulents, but distinct in being heavily impregnated with waxes, making them inflammable, from whence comes their common name. This drought-resistant structure is an adaptation for survival in the harshest, most arid and hence inhospitable environments of southern Africa. It is this ruggedness that both intrigues and appeals to all of us who are captivated by succulent plants. Marloth intimated that the taxonomy of these plants has not been uncontroversial. He knew them as *Sarcocaulon*, but prior to that some of them had been classed as geraniums and monsonias, and it is back in the genus *Monsonia* where they currently sit. This taxonomic shift is unfortunate because this distinctive small group of plants no longer has an exclusive home, since they have as bedfellows small, non-succulent herbs. However, the term Bushman Candles uniquely identifies the 15 species that feature in this book, so this is a useful handle.

These Bushman Candles have staunch devotees in Charles Craib and John Lavranos, who have been observing these plants in their habitats for over 30 years. It is the plants as they occur in the wild that is the focus of this book, so this is not a traditional taxonomic work. *The Bushman Candles* follows on from Charles's earlier books *Geophytic Pelargoniums* (Umdaus Press, 2001) and *Grass Aloes in the South African Veld* (Umdaus Press, 2005) where the main themes were ecological, unusual for works on succulent plants. Hence Charles and John follow in the footsteps of Marloth in bringing the Bushman Candles to our attention in this, the first book ever to be devoted to these remarkably resilient plants.

My own involvement with these plants has been a small contribution in the publication of the new combination *M. lavrani* and I am delighted that this commemorates one of the authors of this book, a well-deserved accolade indeed.

This book also follows a strong tradition in South African botanical art. Marloth's book was beautifully illustrated with colour plates and the current book is also visually appealing. The exquisite and botanically accurate water colour paintings of Ellaphie Ward-Hilhorst were first published by Rodney Moffett in his paper *The genus Sarcocaulon*, in the journal *Bothalia* in 1979. Most of these paintings, though, were reproduced in a reduced size, but are now published in full size where their artistic merit can be fully appreciated. These provide the detail of each distinct species of Bushman Candle, based on plants in cultivation. To complement these, the plants in nature are portrayed in newly commissioned paintings by the renowned artist Gerhard Marx, along with pencil drawings of their habitats by Bowen Boshier, that together bring the harsh, arid environments in which these plants reside vividly alive. Reflections of all of this work are provided by these artists, the photographer Connall Oosterbroek and the taxonomist Rodney Moffett. This book, then, is truly a collaborative venture amongst a wide group of enthusiasts bringing together a diverse collection of skills to produce a book that not only provides a fascinating insight into an intriguing group of plants, but also presents them in a range of beautifully evocative images.



*Monsonia crassicaulis*. This plant, typical of the species in the Little Karoo, has long petiolar spines. Drawing: Gerhard Marx.

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