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224 pages, 20 colour plates, 148 coloured figures, 10 half tone figures, 19 maps, 4 tables. 25.4×19cm. Soft, laminated, illustrated covers.

The periodical Flowering Plants of Africa (FPA) began life in 1921 as The Flowering Plants of South Africa, "A magazine containing hand-coloured figures with descriptions of the flowering plants indigenous to South Africa". In 1945 its coverage was broadened to encompass the whole of the African continent as well as Madagascar. Colour printing was also adopted at this time because of the post-war dearth of hand colourists alongside the expense of hand colouring. Its aim was to publicise to a wide audience the spectacular and wonderfully diverse African flora. Its appeal is not just to plant scientists but it is also of great interest to horticulturalists and gardeners because many widely cultivated plants in gardens have southern African origins such as agapanthus, aloes, mesembs, pelargoniums, proteas, strelitzias and many more. An accompanying aim was to showcase South African botanical art because the country has produced an incredible range of exceptionally talented botanical artists. Including this latest volume 68, a total of 2,400 colour plates and their accompanying texts have been published. Over the 102 years of its existence a wide range of African and Madagascan succulents have featured in the FPA, notably just over 200 aloes, plus many stapelias, ceropegias, mesembs, etc., including a number of new species described for the first time.

Recent volumes have been published biannually. Volume 68 includes 20 papers each with a coloured plate, eight of which feature succulents. Fourteen of the plates are by the exceptionally talented artist Gillian Condy who, although now retired, has contributed over 400 plates to the series. Seven of the papers are by Gideon Smith and his collaborators and treat the following: Aloe labiaflava Groenewald (t.2381, South Africa), Aloiampeles tenuior var. ernsti Gideon F.Sm. & Figueiredo (t.2382, South Africa), Kalanchoe daigremontiana Raym.-Hamet & H.Perrier (t.2386, Madagascar), Kalanchoe luciae Raym.-Hamet (t.2387, southern and south-tropical Africa), Kalanchoe neglecta Toelken (t.2388, southern Africa), Kalanchoe orgyalis Baker (t.2389, Madagascar) and Kalanchoe ×estrelae Gideon F.Sm. (t.2390, South Africa). The paper by D Vaz De Sousa and collaborators deals with Ceropegia lineariloba Bruyns (t.2396, South Africa), which in the narrower sense will be more familiar to readers as either Quaqua linearis (N.E.Br.) Bruyns or Caralluma linearis N.E.Br. For each plant there is detailed discussion, usually covering the following topics: history of discovery, which is often extensively dealt with, taxonomy, closely related taxa, principal features, habitat, distribution and cultivation, accompanied by a full description. Each colour plate beautifully illustrates the key features of the plant and its flowers. Accompanying photos, usually in colour, illustrate the plant in habit and in cultivation; sometimes there are portraits of notable botanists associated with the given plant. Coverage overall therefore represents a mini monograph of each species, variety or hybrid.

The plate reproduced here illustrates K. ×estrelae which is the naturally occurring hybrid K. luciae × K. sexangularis. The new cultivar, K. ×estrelae ‘Fire Engine’ is named because the “plants, especially the leaves, are bright, fire-engine-red when grown in full sun”. It is also worthy of note that this volume of FPA is dedicated to Estrela Figueiredo, who “is a prolific author and has authored or co-authored 300 scientific and other papers, and as a strong supporter of botanical art, has collaborated on several species monographs in...FPA”.

In summary, this volume continues the century-old tradition of showcasing the spectacular range of African plant biodiversity and botanical art; long may it continue to do so.

Colin C Walker