

Brunsvigia orientalis (Linnaeus) Aiton ex
Ecklon

Candelabra flower, Koningskandelaar,
Perdespookbossie
Amaryllidaceae



Brunsvigia was named by Heister in 1753 in honour of the Duke of Brunswick, Karl Wilhelm Ferdinand (October 9, 1735 – October 16, 1806) He was a sovereign prince of the Holy Roman Empire, and a professional soldier who served as a Generalfeldmarschall of the Kingdom of Prussia. Born in Wolfenbüttel, Germany, he was duke of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel from 1780 until 1806. He is regarded as master of the modern warfare of the mid-18th century. He was a cultured and benevolent despot in the model of Frederick the Great. He married Princess Augusta, a sister of George III of Great Britain.

Brunsvigia orientalis is a spectacular bulbous geophyte, which grows in scattered colonies on coastal sand. Visitors to Leisure Island are likely to see this beautiful plant growing in Steenbok Nature Reserve when it blooms from February to April. This year the first blooms have appeared in the first week of January. The drought which is gripping the Southern

Cape is probably the cause of early flowering. Populations have decreased since the first census was held in 2000. The count last year was 220 compared with 880 in 2000. The decline may be contributed to frequent Lily borer attacks, and invading Cogon grass (*Imperatus cylindrica*)

Description

Height: 40-50cm high.

Habit: bulb (10-15cm in diam.) is protected by brittle tunics

Leaves: 4-8, dry at flowering, flat on the ground, oblong, 7-19cm wide, the upper surface usually velvety. (leaves appear well after flowering)

Flowers: 20-40, rarely more, in a large spherical umbel, bright to light red, perianth tube to 5mm long, tepals 40-60mm long, overlapping then rolled back, pedicels stout, curved at flowering, straight at fruiting.

Fruit: capsule 30-70 mm long, three angled, the angles strongly ribbed, flat-topped, tapering basally.

Flowering time: February to April depending on climatic conditions

Habitat: usually on coastal forelands in sand, rarely clay. Occurs from southern Namaqualand to Worcester, Cape Peninsula to Knysna

Ecology: pollinated by sunbirds. Host to the *Amaryllis* caterpillar/Lily borer, *Brithys crini pancrttii*

Toxicity: Amaryllis poisoning: The bulb contains alkaloids such as lycorine which are toxic but a large quantity would need to be eaten to cause poisoning. Symptoms of poisoning include abdominal pain, salivation, nausea, diarrhoea & vomiting

Cultivation: sow Brunsvigia seeds as soon as possible after harvesting in a very well-drained, sandy medium to which some fine compost is added. Water sparingly after the first leaves appear. If leaves are yellowing, withhold water. Plant in sandy soil, in an open area. This truly water wise plant needs no additional irrigation. Plants should be left undisturbed as they dislike being transplanted.

Pests and diseases: prone to lily borer attacks. *Brithys crini pancratii* is brightly coloured, yellow and black striped, with black dots like eyes on the head and base of the body. Fully grown caterpillars are about 40mm long.



The caterpillar is less active in colder months, and more active when it's hot, wet or humid. It pupates in leaf litter, then moves onto the plant to begin feeding. The young caterpillars feed in colonies, tunneling into the leaves. The older larvae tend to feed also into the bulb. Apart from chewing the leaf surfaces, they can also damage the leaf sheath at the base of the plant. Left unchecked the lily caterpillar causes horrific damage, and often kills plants. Other plants affected by lily borer: crinum, amaryllis and clivia, cyrtanthus, haemanthus, and nerine. The worst infestations normally occur from September to April.

Control:

Early morning is the best time to find the culprits, as it feeds at night and normally hides by day. Look on both sides of the leaf, and down into the base of the plant. There are no chemicals registered specifically to control the lily caterpillar. However, products registered for the treatment of moth or butterfly caterpillars can be used. If you are more environmentally friendly, the caterpillars can be removed physically and squashed. Damaged leaves may also be attacked by fungal spores which result in leaves turning brown and dying, it is a good idea to remove any damaged leaves or plants.

References:

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