

Notes on *Ornithogalum lithopsoides*

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Augmentation of the first description made in 2009 of a cryptic new species of succulent ornithogalum of subgenus *Aspasia*, with the key characters that distinguish it from its near relatives. Photography by the author.

The Southern African subcontinent possesses what may be described as the richest flora world-wide. It includes around 2000 bulbous plants, representing some 11% of the total number of species in the region. Of these, the genus *Ornithogalum* has approximately 200 species of which more than one hundred are endemic.

While on a journey to South Africa in September 2007, I took the opportunity to visit the region of Oudtshoorn, which boasts a particularly interesting flora. My specific aim was to make an in situ study of *Ornithogalum sardienii*, and happily I achieved this purpose by visiting the hills around Volmoed.

Two days later I was on the low hills bordering on the northern suburbs of the town of Oudtshoorn on a quest for a diminutive form of *Haworthia truncata* when, among the numerous plants of a *Glottiphyllum* sp. and *Conophytum truncatum*, my attention was attracted by a small bulb with linear and slightly channelled leaves. On first sight this bulb looked very similar to *O. sardienii*, but a closer look made me think that it might represent a different taxon.

Upon returning to France, I hastened to send a photo of the bulb to Ernst van Jaarsveld, Curator of Succulents at the Botanical Garden at Kirstenbosch, who replied at once that I was dealing with a new species that he himself had found three years previously to the east of the town of Oudtshoorn and had intended to describe in the journal *Bothalia*. However, his text had been rejected on the grounds that this bulb was probably but one of the numerous forms of *O. juncifolium*. Thus the proposed description fell into oblivion until the day when I sent a photo to Ernst for a proper identification.

Fig. 1 *Ornithogalum juncifolium* at W Cape, Oudtshoorn District, Dysseldorp, 30km E of Oudtshoorn town, at the foot of the Kamanassie Mtns





Fig. 2 *Ornithogalum juncifolium* inflorescence. This agrees well with the iconotype illustration of Jacquin (1797)



Fig. 3 *Ornithogalum lithopsoides* inflorescence



Fig. 4 *Ornithogalum sardienii* inflorescence

Comparison of *O. lithopsoides* with three other species of the section *Angustifoliata*

	<i>O. lithopsoides</i>	<i>O. perdurans</i>	<i>O. juncifolium</i>	<i>O. sardienii</i>
Bulb	15–25mm Ø proliferous	20–30mm Ø often solitary	to 40mm Ø often solitary	5–18mm Ø often solitary
Leaf	12–15 12–70mm long linear-canaliculate deciduous	4–13 40–60mm long semi-terete, twisted evergreen	1–7 200–600mm long filiform to linear deciduous	20–50 15–25mm long linear-lanceolate margins ciliate evergreen
Inflorescence	1 100–150mm tall	1 190–250mm tall	1–3 400–600mm tall	1–5 150–240mm tall
Perianth	7–8mm long	6.4–7.4mm long	7–10mm long	5–6mm long



Fig. 5 *Ornithogalum sardienii* at Volmoed, 15km SW of Oudtshoorn



Fig. 6 *Ornithogalum lithopsoides* N of Oudtshoorn town

It was then that he decided to publish it as a new species in the journal *Aloe*, where he compared *O. lithopsoides* with three other species of *Ornithogalum* that form part of the section *Angustifoliata*: *O. sardienii*, *O. juncifolium* and *O. perdurans*. Listed in the table on the previous page are the principal characters that distinguish these four species.

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