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*

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

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