

Ceropegia meyeri occurs along the eastern part of southern Africa from Transkei northwards to Natal, Transvaal, Mozambique and into Zimbabwe. It is found growing naturally in shrubs and undergrowth where it finds protection against the scorching sun and desiccation.

At a site near Piet Retief in the eastern Transvaal where a colony of these plants was observed, the plants grew on the eastern aspect of a granitic outcrop in a black humic soil. The rainfall in this area averages about 800 mm per annum and the impervious rock near the plants probably channels additional water to the plants. The precipitation occurs mainly during the summer months. During the winter, which is usually cool and dry, the plants survive by their tubers becoming dormant.

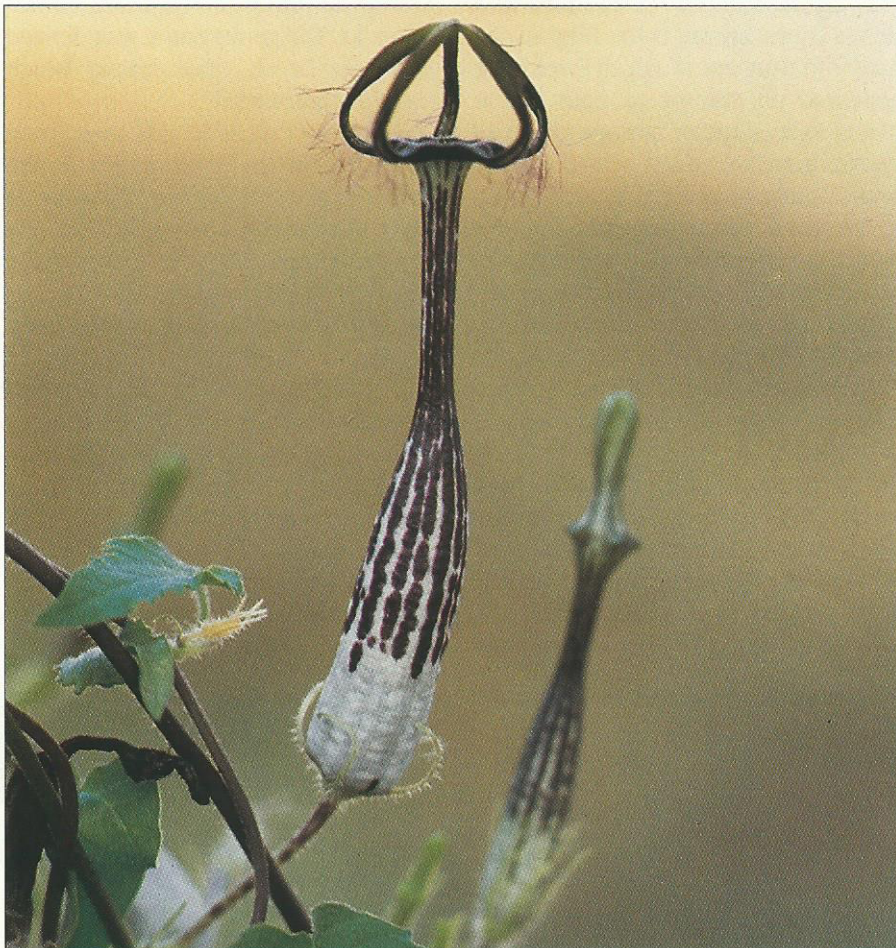
More than 50 plants grow in this colony, huddled together in the small area of suitable moist soil. All sizes and ages of plants are found. The plants are occasionally pruned by the cattle which are kept in the area.

After the first rains in spring, the plant rapidly develops a single twining vine. This is non-succulent and hairy, and the paired heart- to irregular-shaped hairy leaves develop in succession. During summer, at each leaf axil, flower buds are initiated and 3-4 flowers develop at each node. The attractive flower has a whitish inflated basal bulb whilst the corolla tips form a cage of a blue-black colour. The flowers measure 40-50 mm in length and 10 mm in width. This succulent plant is unusual in that the shape of the corolla differs from the normal typical *ceropegia* in having a bottle-shaped inflated corolla bulb.

The flowers attract small flies which enter the corolla bulb via the openings at the corolla tips. The flies move past small inward-pointing hairs which allow entry into the bulb only and thus force the flies to remain within the flower for about a day. During this time, the flies seek out and drink the nectar at the base of the flower, using their proboscis (tongue). With this feeding action, the pollinia are often picked up as well. At the next feeding occasion the pollinia are pushed down along with the proboscis and on withdrawal, the pollinia hook onto the guide of the stigmatic surface, and pollination

Ceropegia meyeri Decne., an attractive and unusual succulent plant

Ralph Peckover



The attractive flower of *Ceropegia meyeri*, showing the bottle-shaped corolla bulb.

occurs. After a day, the hairs within the flower which prevented escape, wilt and the flies escape, often carrying the pollinia to the next flower for cross-pollination. The flies are attracted to the flowers by various scents.

If the flower is pollinated, the pedicel will remain attached and within a week or so, the double seed capsules will begin to develop. The seed pods develop to 50-60 mm long and 2 mm wide. After 2-3 months the pods mature and shed their typical tufted seeds.

The seed may be stored in a dry place through winter, and may then be planted during September-

October in a sandy humic soil. The seedlings should be kept moist and will develop quickly, even producing flowers and developing seeds in the first season. The plants themselves easily wilt if the soil dries out. In order to enjoy the numerous attractive flowers, the plants should be watered frequently, up to twice a week depending on the need. At the end of April watering should be reduced so that the corms may overwinter in dry conditions.

REFERENCE

Dyer, R.A. 1983. *Ceropegia*, *Brachystelma* and *Riocreuxia* in *Southern Africa*: 222 (reference number 49). Balkema, Rotterdam.