

# Wildflowers of the Steenkampsberg

by Marilize Muller

Edited by Dr Kyle Lloyd

## The Steenkampsberg is known to be rich in orchid species specialised for high-elevation habitats

The Steenkampsberg falls within the Mesic Highveld Grassland Bioregion and more specifically the Steenkampsberg Montane Grassland vegetation type. The landscape is mountainous with plateau grasslands, rocky slopes and shallow valleys. The cool misty atmosphere, with an average daytime temperature of 22°C in summer and high average rainfall of 800 mm, makes this a unique habitat for many interesting plant species. Wildflowers have adapted to cope with regular fire, frost and seasonal climate of this high-elevation system. One of the ways in which wildflowers can survive fire and frost is by having belowground storage organs. The plants re-sprout only after a rise in temperature and sufficient summer rain. The best time to view the area carpeted in colourful blossoms is, therefore, November to February.

Nearly 300 species of wildflowers have been observed around Dullstroom, among them Gladioli, Wahlenbergias, Osteospermums and Pelargoniums. The Steenkampsberg hosts 54 South African endemics, of which 14 are endemic to the Steenkampsberg Montane Grassland and 17 are considered threatened.

Verloren Valei Nature Reserve is a prime destination for wildflower enthusiasts. The reserve has a high diversity of plants, especially within the orchid family with 56 known species. Orchids have highly specialised flowers adapted for insect pollination. Their seeds are very light and are mostly dispersed by wind. Orchid seeds also lack a reserve of food for the developing embryo and are, therefore, dependent on the presence of fungi (mycorrhiza) to germinate and develop.

The top 10 species to see in terms of endemism and regional threat status include:

### Scientific name

1. *Aloe challisii*
2. *Aloe modesta*
3. *Brachystelma stellatum*
4. *Crotalaria monophylla*
5. *Disa klugei*
6. *Eucomis vandermerwei*
7. *Gladiolus malvinus*
8. *Khadia alticola*
9. *Riocrexia aberrans*
10. *Streptocarpus latens*

### Family

- Asphodelaceae  
Asphodelaceae  
Apocynaceae  
Fabaceae  
Orchidaceae  
Hyacinthaceae  
Iridaceae  
Aizoaceae  
Apocynaceae  
Gesneriaceae

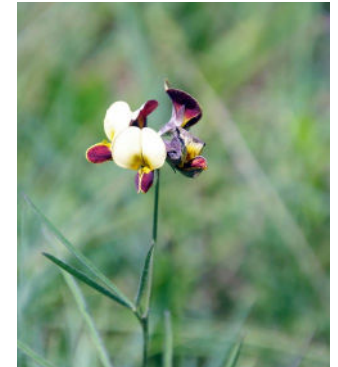
For more information, please visit [Wild Orchids of Southern Africa \(WOSA\)](#) and [Friends of Verloren Valei](#). You can also contribute to our knowledge about wildflowers by uploading your photos to [iNaturalist](#).

### Wildflower and orchid field guides:

Van Ede, G. 2016. *Flowers of Verloren Valei: Field guide to the orchids and selected flowers of Verloren Valei Nature Reserve*. Wild Orchids Southern Africa, Johannesburg.

McMurtry, D., Grobler, L., Grobler, J. & Burns, S. 2008. *Field Guide to the Orchids of Northern South Africa and Swaziland*. Umदाus Press, Pretoria.

Johnson, S., Bytebier, B. & Stärker, H. 2015. *Orchids of South Africa: A Field Guide*. Penguin Random House, South Africa.



*Crotalaria monophylla* Thinus Prinsloo



*Disa chrysostachya* Phillip Nieuwoudt



*Habenaria clavata* Phillip Nieuwoudt



*Orthochilus aculeatus subsp. huttonii*  
Phillip Nieuwoudt



*Habenaria thysonii* Phillip Nieuwoudt



*Brownleea parviflora* Thinus Prinsloo



*Disa brevicornis* Thinus Prinsloo



*Disperis stenoplectron* Thinus Prinsloo



*Khadia alticola* Andrew Hankey



*Aloe challisii* Duncan McKenzie