

Crinum campanulatum , Vlei Lily

The several vleis on the Grahamstown Aerodrome Flats, about 4 km NW of central town, hold water only after heavy rains. Most of these vleis produce their quota of Vlei Lilies as soon as enough water has accumulated, ~~which~~^{This} might occur fairly regularly each year ~~or~~^{or} which may not occur for several years, depending on drought conditions.

Mrs. Louise Mullins, wife of the headmaster of St. Andrews' Preparatory School, Grahamstown, noticed that the first vlei off the main Cradock Road never had vlei lilies despite other lesser vleis within a few hundred metres of it being well-stocked with the lilies. She wondered why the hiatus should have occurred.

Some time in the 1960's she took a few plants from one of the lily-filled vleis and planted them round the edge of this bare vlei. No more was seen of these plants until about 1974 when one stool of leaves showed through the water at the northeast corner of the vlei. No flowers appeared.

It was thought that this was the only plant to have survived, (if indeed it was one of those Mrs. Mullins had transplanted) but after the exceptional rains of August and September 1979 when ^{that amounted to} the annual rainfall fell in two drenching spells and filled the vleis more than they were accustomed to, that the vlei lilies in this bare ~~vlei~~ vlei came to be seen.

Originally the vlei, known as Island Vlei to some people because it has a natural island in its centre, was almost a complete circle in shape but when the netting fence was constructed through its centre line a bank of ground was thrown up to carry the wire above water level. Thus the vlei was bisected into two semicircular vleis.

In the eastern half of the vlei, four plants developed and showed themselves clearly above the water. Only the ~~XXXXXX~~ northeastern one mentioned above as having been unflowered before, flowered in September 1979 for

for the first time, as far as is known. The other three plants threw up only about three leaves.

The western half of the vlei, the portion on Mr. Mike Palmer's farm, "Strowan", had five plants, two of which flowered.

Thus, in the two halves together, nine plants showed themselves, three of them producing flowers.

Photographs of the northeast plant in flower were taken, and also views of part of the vlei to show absence of plants generally. Future photographs in, say, 50 years, 2029 A.D., may show a vlei covered with Vlei Lily plants, or they may show no developments.

C.J. Skead

Grahamstown. 1979.10.15

