



Namaqualand: A Succulent Desert

Richard Cowling, Shirley Pierce

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Namaqualand – a desert of succulents. From dwarf species barely a few millimetres tall to trees several metres high, the range of succulent plants in this seemingly desolate region is unrivalled in both its extent and its variety of forms. Tiny plants that resemble flowering stones dot a plain of quartz; a minute 'garden' fills a rock crevice; an exuberant burst of vygies colours a patch of veld.

About a third of the 3000 or so plant species in Namaqualand are succulents, and they include the largest concentration of miniature succulent species in the world. But there is much more. Namaqualand's bulb flora is the richest of any arid region on earth: amaryllids, irids, lilies and many more, all presenting an astonishing diversity of colour and form. Add to these the spectacular vistas of spring-flowering annuals for which Namaqualand is most famous, and the result is a truly remarkable flora, unrivalled elsewhere on earth. Yet for many years it has been overshadowed by the Cape Floral Kingdom to the south. In this exploration of a harsh wonderland, Richard Cowling and Shirley Pierce embark on redressing the balance, and in doing so discover climatic and other factors that have contributed to Namaqualand's rich flora. They reveal intriguing details of how plants survive a range of adverse conditions and, following the cycle of seasons, they highlight extraordinary facets of the plants' reproduction, including intricate relationships with insect pollinators.

Complementing the text, Colin Paterson-Jones's magnificent photographs capture the vibrant colours of Namaqualand's flora, in both panorama and detail conveying the essence of this awe-inspiring land.

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