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STEVEN HAMMER

# Graham Williamson and the Eighteenth Step

“**Y**ou see, but you do not observe. The distinction is clear. For example, you have frequently seen the steps which lead up from the hall to this room.”  
“Frequently.” “How often?”  
“Well, some hundreds of times.”  
“Then how many are there?”  
“How many! I don’t know.”  
“Quite so! You have not observed. And yet you have seen. That is just my point. Now, I know that

there are seventeen steps, because I have both seen and observed.”

The words, from Conan Doyle’s *A Scandal in Bohemia*, belong to Holmes and Watson, but if we substitute Williamson for Holmes, and most of us for Watson, we gain an insight into how Graham Williamson has discovered so much about so many organisms. In theory, the formula is simple: careful observation repeated as many times and in as many places as necessary. In practice, success requires equal parts of sweat, courage, and independence. It

**Table 1. A list of succulent plants described by Graham Williamson. In addition Graham described over 35 taxa in the Orchidaceae.**

<i>Adromischus coleorum</i> G.Will.	<i>Cactus &amp; Co.</i> 12(4): 267. 2008
<i>Anacampseros hillii</i> G.Will.	<i>Aloe</i> 45(1): 16. 2008
<i>Anacampseros mallei</i> (G.Will.) G.Will.	<i>Aloe</i> 34(1–2): 45. 1997
<i>Anacampseros pisina</i> G.Will.	<i>Aloe</i> 35(1): 18. 1998.
<i>Anacampseros prominens</i> G.Will.	<i>Aloe</i> 34(1–2): 45. 199
<i>Anacampseros retusa</i> Poelln. subsp. <i>lanuginosa</i> G.Will.	<i>Excelsa</i> 20: 29. 2003
<i>Anacampseros retusa</i> Poelln. f. <i>parva</i> G.Will.	<i>Excelsa</i> 20: 29. 2003
<i>Anacampseros retusa</i> Poelln. f. <i>rubra</i> G.Will.	<i>Excelsa</i> 20: 27. 2003
<i>Anacampseros scopata</i> G.Will.	<i>Cact. Succ. J. (Los Angeles)</i> 66(1): 20. 1994
<i>Anacampseros vanthielii</i> G.Will.	<i>Aloe</i> 43(1): 12. 2006
<i>Avonia albissima</i> (Marloth) G.D.Rowley var. <i>grisea</i> G.Will.	<i>Aloe</i> 46(3): 70. 2009
<i>Avonia garipeensis</i> G.Will.	<i>Aloe</i> 43(1): 14. 2006
<i>Avonia lavbleckiana</i> G.Will.	<i>Aloe</i> 46(3): 65. 2009
<i>Avonia lavbleckiana</i> G.Will. subsp. <i>major</i> G.Will.	<i>Aloe</i> 46(3): 70. 2009
<i>Avonia mallei</i> G.Will.	<i>Cact. Succ. J. (Los Angeles)</i> 67(2): 104. 1995
<i>Avonia perplexa</i> G.Will.	<i>Aloe</i> 43(1): 15. 2006
<i>Avonia prominens</i> (G.Will.) G.Will.	<i>Brit. Cact. Succ. J.</i> 15(4): 208. 1997
<i>Avonia recurvata</i> (Schönland) G.D.Rowley subsp. <i>buderiana</i> (Poelln.) G.Will.	<i>Aloe</i> 35(1): 22. 1998
<i>Avonia variabilis</i> (Poelln.) G.Will.	<i>Aloe</i> 35(1): 19. 1998
<i>Bulbine canaliculata</i> G.Will.	<i>Bradleya</i> 18: 37. 2000
<i>Bulbine capensis</i> Baijnath ex G.Will.	<i>Aloe</i> 43(4): 91. 2006
<i>Bulbine dactyloposoides</i> G.Will.	<i>Aloe</i> 41(2-3): 32. 2004
<i>Bulbine disimilis</i> G.Will.	<i>Aloe</i> 34(3–4): 70. 1997
<i>Bulbine erectipilosa</i> G.Will.	<i>Aloe</i> 38(1-2): 28. 2001
<i>Bulbine fragilis</i> G.Will.	<i>Haseltonia</i> 4: 13. 1996
<i>Bulbine francescae</i> G.Will. & Baijnath	<i>S. African J. Bot.</i> 61(6): 312. 1995
<i>Bulbine inamarxiae</i> G.Will. & A.P.Dold	<i>Aloe</i> 41(2-3): 28. 2004
<i>Bulbine lamprophylla</i> G.Will.	<i>Bradleya</i> 14: 84. 1996
<i>Bulbine lavrani</i> G.Will. & Baijnath	<i>Aloe</i> 36(2–3): 28. 1999
<i>Bulbine melanovaginata</i> G.Will.	<i>Aloe</i> 40(1): 16. 2003
<i>Bulbine muscicola</i> G.Will.	<i>Bradleya</i> 18: 36. 2000
<i>Bulbine navicularifolia</i> G.Will.	<i>Aloe</i> 40(1): 16. 2003
<i>Bulbine ophiophylla</i> G.Will.	<i>Aloe</i> 40(1): 19. 2003
<i>Bulbine pendens</i> G.Will. & Baijnath	<i>S. African J. Bot.</i> 61(6): 316. 1995
<i>Bulbine quartzicola</i> G.Will.	<i>Haseltonia</i> 4: 19. 1996
<i>Bulbine rupicola</i> G.Will.	<i>Bradleya</i> 18: 36. 2000
<i>Bulbine semenaliundata</i> G.Will.	<i>Aloe</i> 40(1): 8. 2003
<i>Bulbine stolonifera</i> Baijnath ex G.Will.	<i>Aloe</i> 43(4): 93. 2006
<i>Bulbine torsiva</i> G.Will.	<i>Haseltonia</i> 4: 21. 1996
<i>Bulbine truncata</i> G.Will.	<i>Haseltonia</i> 4: 19. 1996
<i>Bulbine undulata</i> G.Will.	<i>Bradleya</i> 18: 33. 2000
<i>Bulbine vitrea</i> G.Will. & Baijnath	<i>S. African J. Bot.</i> 61(6): 314. 1995
<i>Bulbine vittatifolia</i> G.Will.	<i>Haseltonia</i> 4: 21. 1996
<i>Cheiridopsis campanulata</i> G.Will.	<i>Aloe</i> 37(1): 4. 2000
<i>Conophytum hammeri</i> G.Will. & H.C.Kenn.	<i>Cact. Succ. J. (Los Angeles)</i> 69(4): 205. 1997
<i>Crassula aurusbergensis</i> G.Will.	<i>Cact. Succ. J. (Los Angeles)</i> 64(6): 288. 1992
<i>Drimia occultans</i> G.Will.	<i>Cact. Succ. J. (Los Angeles)</i> 83(6): 287. 2012
<i>Euphorbia einensis</i> G.Will.	<i>Haseltonia</i> 10: 57. 2004
<i>Euphorbia einensis</i> G.Will. var. <i>anemoarenicola</i> G.Will.	<i>Haseltonia</i> 10: 62. 2004

Table 1. Continued

<i>Euphorbia ephedroides</i> E.Mey. var. <i>imminuta</i> L.C.Leach & G.Will.	<i>S. African J. Bot.</i> 56(1): 72. 1990
<i>Euphorbia filiflora</i> Marloth var. <i>nana</i> G.Will.	<i>Bradleya</i> 21: 49. 2003
<i>Euphorbia gammaranoi</i> G.Will.	<i>Euphorbia World</i> 2(3): 9. 2006
<i>Euphorbia glandularis</i> L.C.Leach & G.Will.	<i>S. African J. Bot.</i> 56(1): 75. 1990
<i>Euphorbia maryrichardsiae</i> G.Will.	<i>Euphorbia World</i> 4(3): 10. 2008
<i>Euphorbia versicolores</i> G.Will.	<i>Cact. Succ. J. (Los Angeles)</i> 67(5): 284. 1995
<i>Monadenium kimberleyanum</i> G.Will.	<i>Excelsa</i> 19: 56. 1999
<i>Ornithogalum decus-montium</i> G.Will.	<i>Bothalia</i> 28(1): 63. 1998
<i>Oxalis psammophila</i> G.Will.	<i>Aloe</i> 36(4): 68. 1999.
<i>Tylecodon aridimontanus</i> G.Will.	<i>Cact. Succ. J. (Los Angeles)</i> 67(2): 114. 1995
<i>Tylecodon aurusbergensis</i> G.Will. & van Jaarsv.	<i>Aloe</i> 29(3–4): 60. 1992
<i>Tylecodon bleckiae</i> G.Will.	<i>Cact. Succ. J. (Los Angeles)</i> 70(3): 127. 1998
<i>Tylecodon buchholzianus</i> (Schuldt & Steph.) Toelken var. <i>fasciculatus</i> G.Will.	<i>Aloe</i> 29(3–4): 62. 1992
<i>Tylecodon cordiformis</i> G.Will.	<i>Cact. Succ. J. (Los Angeles)</i> 70(5): 255. 1998
<i>Tylecodon longipes</i> van Jaarsv. & G.Will.	<i>Aloe</i> 31(3–4): 56. 1994
<i>Tylecodon mallei</i> G.Will.	<i>Cact. Succ. J. (Los Angeles)</i> 67(2): 114. 1995
<i>Tylecodon nigricaulis</i> G.Will. & van Jaarsv.	<i>Aloe</i> 36(2–3): 43. 1999

helps that Graham has had the sense to live on the right continent. Moreover, his work in Oranjemund, Namibia - as an exponent of the boldest profession, he tended human ivories - gave him repeated access to the rarely explored Sperrgebiet.

Readers familiar with Graham's early career will know of his pioneering observations amongst the Zambian orchids. Others will think of southern African euphorbias or of his studies of unilateral romance in *Anacampseros*. If I think rather of the mesembs he has found and studied, and especially of his plethoric Namaqualand bulbines, that is partly my own bias but also the number, oddness, and sheer beauty of the finds. In *Bulbine* alone he has described a score of species, the spectacular and inconspicuous alike (Table 1).

Crucially, Graham has facilitated the observations of others. His unusual kindness has blossomed many times and for many people. Do you need to know more about *Conophytum taylorianum*, which

is protected by endless dunes and treaties? The wrinkliest *C. angelicae*, shar-pei of the vegetable kingdom? *Psammophora nissenii*, the sticky-leaved mesemb which coats itself with sand and hides like an Iranian centrifuge? The reddest-blooded *Lithops optica* fma. *rubra*? The rosiest *Monilaria*? Well, I know just the person to ask.

I've yet to find a botanical or logistical problem which doesn't interest Graham. Recently I asked him about self-fertility in *Bulbine fragilis* G. Williamson. He gently reminded me that we'd both observed this phenomenon many years earlier, in Françoise Williamson's sunny kitchen. I too had seen the fruits turning plump and orange, like tiny hot peppers, but had forgotten the fact. Selfing is so unusual in *Bulbine* that it ought to have impressed me more fixedly. But in Graham's world every behavioral detail is interesting. Indeed, one could say that there are no details. Certainly there are no redundancies. 🍷