

LOUISA BOLUS BIOGRAPHY

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Bolus, [née Kensit] Dr Harriet Margaret Louisa (1877-1970)—taxonomic botanist and describer of many new succulent taxa, with special interest in Mesembryanthemum.



Born in Burgersdorp, Cape Province, South Africa on 31 July 1877, Louisa Bolus became an analytical botanist and taxonomist. She received an honors BA in the Arts degree from South African College, Cape Town in 1902 where Latin was one of her major subjects. During her undergraduate years she helped her great uncle, Harry Bolus (1834-1911), in his herbarium in Cape Town, South Africa. Louisa was appointed curator of the herbarium in 1903.

In the early days as a botanist Louisa devoted her time to heaths and orchids, which were her uncle's main interests. Upon the death of Harry Bolus in 1911 the herbarium and library was moved to the South African College (which became University of Cape Town in 1918), where Louisa continued working for the rest of her life. She married Frank Bolus (1870-1945), her father's cousin and Harry Bolus' son, in 1912. The herbarium employed various artists, such as Miss Mary Maud Page (1867-1925) and Miss Beatrice Orchard Carter (1889-1939), to paint and/or illustrate plant specimens.

Due to a 1925 paper by Kew botanist Nicholas Edward Brown (1849-1934), which appeared in England's *The Gardener's Chronicle*, Louisa's main interest shifted to African succulent plants. She became a specialist in the unwieldy genus *Mesembryanthemum*, which through the efforts of NE Brown, Martin Heinrich Gustav Schwantes (1881-1960) and Louisa Bolus, became divided into many genera under the Ice Plant family, *Mesembryanthemaceae*.

Bolus retired as curator of the herbarium at age 78 in 1955, but continued her taxonomic work there for the rest of her life. The university made her an Honorary Reader in Plant Taxonomy, and she was provided a reserved area on the top floor of the herbarium.

Bolus received many African succulent plant specimens from collectors and other scientists. From these specimen plants she described a number of new genera (many named for people that sent her the specimens), including *Esterhuysenia* (Elsie Elizabeth Esterhuysen (1912–2006)), *Jacobsenia* (Hermann Johannes Heinrich Jacobsen (1898–1978)), *Leipoldtia* (Christian Frederick Louis Leipoldt (1880–1947)), *Neohenricia* (Marguerite Gertrude Anna Henrici (1892–1971)), *Ottosonderia* (Otto Wilhelm Sonder (1812–1881)), *Peersia* (Victor Stanley Peers (1874–1940)), *Ruschianthus* (Ernst Franz Theodor Rusch (1897–1964)), *Stayneria* (Frank J Stayner (1907–1981)), *Vanzijlia* (Dorothy van Zijl) and *Wooleya* (Charles Hugh Frederick Wooley (1894–1969)). Louisa described some 1700 new species of succulent plants, especially under *Argyroderma*, *Bergeranthus*, *Cephalophyllum*, *Cheiridopsis*, *Conophytum*, *Delosperma*, *Drosanthemum*, *Lampranthus*, *Mesembryanthemum*, *Ruschia*, *Stomatium* and *Trichodiadema*. Two genera were named after Louisa [Kensit] Bolus, *Bolusanthemum* in 1928 (now a synonym of *Hereroa*) and *Kensitia* in 1940. Three succulent species were named in her honor: *Conophytum bolusiae*, *Ruschia bolusiae* and *Stomatium bolusiae*.

Bolus received an honorary Doctor of Science degree from the University of Stellenbosch in 1936, became an IOS member in 1955 and received the prestigious CSSA Fellow award in 1969 for curator of Bolus Herbarium, University of Cape Town for 43 years, describer of about 2,000 species of succulents (primarily Mesembryanthema) and author of many publications. She authored a number of books and papers, primarily on mesembs. Her last publication, "Notes on Mesembryanthemum and Allied Genera", appearing in *Journal of South African Botany* was in 1969 with her usual "(to be continued)".

Confined to her home during the last few months of her life, Louisa Bolus died at age 93 on 5 April 1970.

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