

Celtis africana

Sterkfontein Country Estates April 2015

Good day once again Celtis friends!

We have had some, almost unseasonal, bits of rain, which certainly helped to break the heat and the drought. But why, oh why could we not have had lots of rain when the summer flowering plants needed it? Some (mostly members of the male fraternity!) say nature is as unpredictable as a woman and that is why they speak of “Mother Nature” instead of “Father Nature”! But what is great is after every small downpour some flowers will suddenly appear – some totally out of season! It’s as if they want to show off before the season changes.

With every bit of rain that falls, flying insects appear out of nowhere – to the delight of the barn swallows who need to fatten up before the long trek to Europe. Now that’s the life – you can get fat and no-one will reprimand you about health issues or that you look ugly, plus you chase the lovely summer weather all year round; no need for winter woollies! The little Amur Falcons also paid the Estate a visit – not as many as last year as we had little rain this summer. They too love a meal of flying insects after a downpour. I wrote more about them in the *Celtis africana* of February 2014.



Amur Falcons (Photo Elmarie Krige)

One of the most beautiful wild flowers growing in the veld on our property is the Pineapple flower or Wild pineapple or also known as the Pineapple lily (*Eucomis autumnalis*). This bright, lime-green plant certainly stands out amongst the gold of our grasses. This is a bulbous plant, the fleshy leaves with their wavy edges are arranged rosette style and the small yellowish-green flowers appear in its hundreds on the stout stalk. The black, shiny round seeds are contained in a tri-coloured capsule – have a look at the photo in the Afrikaans section.



Pineapple lily (*Eucomis autumnalis*) (Photo Elmarie Krige)

All the names given to this plant are very apt – it certainly looks like a pineapple. The scientific name, *Eucomis* is from the Greek *eucomos* meaning beautiful haired. *Eu* means well, good or beautiful and *kome* head of hair. This of course refers to the tuft of leaf-like “hair” (bracts) on top of the flowers. The *autumnalis* part of course refers to the flowering and fruiting time (autumn) – thus a very descriptive name!

This is another plant that has some medicinal values and although the bulb is toxic, many of our local people have used the *Eucomis autumnalis* for medicinal purposes. Decoctions of the bulb in water or milk are used as enemas as treatments for lower-back pain or to assist in post-operative recovery or as an aid to healing fractures. Other ailments treated by concoctions made from this plant are urinary diseases and stomachaches; fevers and colic, flatulence, hangovers, syphilis and it is apparently even used to facilitate childbirth! These claims have not been scientifically tested, so I cannot comment on its validity.

However, research has shown that several homo-isoflavones are found in this plant and flavonoids are well known for their anti-inflammatory and antispasmodic action. *Eucomis autumnalis* also contains some steroidal triterpenoids, which are known to be beneficial in wound therapy. However, once again be careful – rather go to a trained medical practitioner for any ailments you might have, before trying anything yourself.

But one can definitely say - the Wild Pineapple is more than just “a pretty face”!

Just when I think our eagles have all but disappeared, one of them suddenly emerges! I was saying to Garfield on Saturday it looks like our eagles have chosen another home because I haven't seen any of late. Then, Sunday Morning he called me very excitedly and showed me one soaring amongst the clouds, playing in the wind – magnificent to watch!



Juvenile Black-chested Snake eagle, "Little Wing" (Photo Garfield Krige)

Yesterday, (Tuesday 31/March'15) as I went for a walk on Malmani, I heard shrill calls and looked up, and there was Little Wing, flying right above me! This has happened before when I walk the road - suddenly it would be right above me, quite low, and it would cry out. Do forgive me if I am a bit over romantic – but I **want** to believe it recognises me! When it was a chick in the nest and when it left the nest but sat almost all day just testing its wings I used to walk close by and always shouted “Hello Little Wing!” – of course it looked my way, probably not **always** because it eventually recognised me and my dog, but maybe also because I was still perceived as some kind of enemy. But I do want to believe it “knows” me and calls out to get my attention! It is a known fact that they mostly call out when nearing their nest (remember they only become sexually mature after one year of age) or when mating – so I believe Little Wing is saying hello as it recognises me!

I am glad I made the effort (and was lucky enough!) the past breeding season to record their story by way of photos from mating to nesting, breeding and eventually when Little Wing was hatched and eventually became a fully fledged proud young eagle, gracing our skies. Just in case they decide to choose another breeding area, at least I have a very good record of a whole breeding cycle. I am actually planning a page on the website with just their story in pictures. At the moment it is fragmented in different Celtis letters and I would like to have it all on one page, separately from the page on Our Eagles. So watch this space!

A little story within a story – one day I was walking the road and saw Little Wing sitting in its favourite tree and as usual I called out and it looked my way. As it happens, someone's worker was walking on the road as well and asked me, "Who's the madam talking to?" so I replied – "to that beautiful bird in the tree". He looked and said "Oooh so the madam knows him"! I could only chuckle, and told him, yes, that bird kills "all" the snakes, so it is a very "good" bird and we must protect it!

Speaking of birds, we have twice now identified some vultures flying quite low over the Estate. Garfield managed to get a photo or two – not his usual quality photos, as they don't hang around for a photo shoot! We nevertheless were able to identify them as Cape Vultures.



Cape Vulture (*Gyps coprotheres*) (Photo Garfield Krige)

Knowing about the Vulture Restaurant and project near Hartbeespoort, we were wondering if they might be from that area, so I made contact with Kerri from the vulture centre. According to her they have been feeding at the Rhino & Lion Park for the past 30 years and are also using a water source for drinking water near Sterkfontein Caves! Right on our doorstep so to speak! These wonderful, useful birds

are unfortunately often the target of muti collectors and poachers as well as some farmers who see them as an enemy and poison them! How shortsighted! Furthermore, vultures are often killed by feeding on horse carcasses. This happens when horses were treated with anti-inflammatory medication, which is deadly for vultures!

We can all do your bit for conservation - even if not just on our Estate. Visit the website www.Vulpro.com to learn about these amazing birds. This is such a wonderful, interesting website, so do have a look and encourage the kids to have a look too. Join the fight against poaching, "adopt" a vulture and in doing so, save a wonderful species from extinction. Take your kids to the centre and let them learn about these birds, it is a great outing during holidays or on a Sunday! In nature there is a very fine balance; the extinction of one species often have disastrous results to the continued existence of several others.



Our very own contortionist, "nogal" on one leg too! Actually a hadeda grooming itself (Photo Garfield Krige)

In the meantime, love our Estate, enjoy nature and look around your property to see if you have some of our wild flowers there. Remember, we are the envy of so many to have a piece of land in the Cradle, so let us all do our bit to cherish and protect it!



"Who's that at my front door? Oh, it's you Mr Mantis!" This "oke" was about 15 cm long! (Photo Elmarie Krige)

This April Fool's Day quote really makes me chuckle: "This is the day upon which we are reminded of what we are on the other three hundred and sixty four." – by whom else than Mark Twain, pen name of Samuel Langhorne Clemens (November 30, 1835 – April 21, 1910), American author and humorist.

Goeie dag Celtis vriende!

Die laaste tyd het ons so dan en wan 'n buitjie, ampers buite-seisoenale reën gekry en dit het darem gehelp om die ergste hitte en die droogte te breek. Dit sou natuurlik baie meer welkom gewees het toe ons somerblommende plante moes blom! Daar is natuurlik die (gewoonlik die manlike geslag!) wat sê die natuur is net so onvoorspelbaar soos 'n vrou en dis die dat almal van "Moeder Natuur" praat en nie van "Vader Natuur" nie! Hoe dit ook al sy, dis vir my so bak as ek sien hier en daar het 'n plant wat eintlik glad nie juis nou veronderstel is om te blom nie, sommer gou 'n blomknop of twee uitgestoot! Net asof hulle gou nog wil dankie sê vir 'n bietjie nattigheid.

Die reën laat natuurlik vlieënde insekte asof uit die niet uitkruip en die swaeltjies is baie bly daarvoor – hulle moet hulself mos goed vetvoer voor die lang trek na Europa.

Kyk, as dit darem nie die ideale leefstyl is dan weet ek nie; jy ooreet jouself daagliks **juis** om vet te word en niemand gee jou gas omdat jy oorgewig is of ongesond lewe nie. Dan ontsnap jy nog die winterkoue deur jaar na jaar die somer te volg! Met die insekte se verskyning na die reën het ons ook weer besoek van die Oostelike rooipootvalkies gekry – hulle geniet 'n feesmaal van vlieënde goggas net soveel – ek het hulle in meer detail beskryf in die *Celtis africana* van Februarie 2014.



Oostelike Rooipoot Valkies (Amur Valkies) (Foto Elmarie Krige)

Vir my een van die heel mooiste veldblomme wat op ons plot voorkom en juis pas geblom het, is die Pynappellelie of ook genoem die Wilde Pynappel (*Eucomis autumnalis*). Die lemmetjiegroen blare van die plant staan behoorlik uit tussen die ampers eentonige goud van ons grasveld. Hierdie bolplant se vlesige, gekartelde blare groei in 'n rosetvorm en die liggroen-gelerige blommetjies, blom letterlik in hul honderde aan die regop stam. Die blink, ronde swart saadjies kom voor in 'n driekleurige kapsule. Kyk hoe mooi is die plant op die foto in die Engelse afdeling.



"Wilde pynappel" sade (Foto Garfield Krige)

Die name wat die plant dra is interessant en ook baie van pas. Omdat dit lyk na 'n pynappel is Wilde Pynappel baie van pas. 'n Ander oulike naam uit die volksmond is Krulkoppie – kyk na die foto en dis duidelik hoekom! Dit lyk kompleet soos 'n kop met 'n paar weerbarstige krulle wat bo uitsteek! Die wetenskaplike naam weer, is afgelei uit die Grieks en vir my net so mooi. *Eu* staan vir mooi, baie of goed en *kome* verwys na kophare en verwys dus na die "kop" met die blaartjies wat bo uitsteek en kompleet soos 'n klos weerbarstige hare lyk! Die *autumnalis* gedeelte verwys na die tyd van die jaar (herfs) wat die plant blomme en vrugte dra.

Hierdie plant het ook sekere medisinale gebruike en alhoewel die bol giftig is, word daar allerhande konkoksies gemaak deur dit in water of melk te week. Die konkoksies word dan as 'n lawement (dis nou die Afrikaans vir "enema" wat ons eintlik almal ken en gebruik!) gebruik teen allerhande kwinte en kwale soos laeruggpyn, vir herstel na operasies asook om breuke te help herstel! Ander gebruike vir die konkoksies is onder meer vir urinêre infeksies en maagpyn, koors, koliek, winderigheid; goed soos wingerdgriep en sifilis en glo sommer ook om die geboorteproses aan te help! Hierdie sogenaamde medisinale gebruike is nie wetenskaplik getoets nie, so ek sal my nie uitlaat oor die geldigheid hiervan nie!

Maar wat wel bevind is deur middel van navorsing, is dat die plant tog oor sekere "homo-isoflavones" beskik en "flavonoides" is bekend vir hul anti-inflammatoriese en krampwerende eienskappe. *Eucomis autumnalis* beskik ook oor 'n tipe steroïde ("steroidal triterpenoids") wat 'n heilsame uitwerking op wondgenesing het. Nou

voor julle wegval en allerhande aftreksels en brourels van die plant probeer maak, gaan praat liefsv met 'n dokter oor jou kwale!

Een ding is egter verseker: die Krulkoppie is nie net 'n mooi plant met 'n oulike naam nie!



"Wilde pynappel" (*Eucomis autumnalis*) (Foto Elmarie Krige)

Net die afgelope Saterdag nog sê ek vir Garfield ek wonder of ons arende nou verdwyn het, want ek het hulle eintlik lanklaas gesien. Sondag hier rondom middagete roep hy my heel opgewonde om te kom kyk en ja, sowaar, daar sweef een van hulle tussen die wolke rond. Ek neem die mens nie kwalik dat hy wou leer

vlieg nie - kyk maar hoe gemaklik speel 'n arend op die wind; mens wens dadelik jy het vlerke gehad!

Gisteroggend (Dinsdag) toe ek weer in Malmani stap, hoor ek die skril fluitroep en sowaar reg bokant, sommer naby aan my, is Little Wing! Dis ook nie eerste keer wat ek in die pad stap en hy dan met 'n gefluit reg bokant ons verskyn nie. Ag, ek weet ek verromanitseer dit seker, maar ek wil graag glo dat ons jongeling my herken! Toe hy nog 'n kuiken was en selfs later in sy geliefde boom rondgesit het, het ek elke keer wat ek naby verbystap "Hello Little Wing!" geroep en ja, dan het hy sy kop na my toe gedraai. Ek glo hy het my en my hond dalk al gewoon begin raak omdat ons elke dag verbygestap het, maar om eerlik te wees is dit sekerlik ook 'n geval van dat ek steeds as 'n tipe "vyand" gesien is en dus dopgehou was. Maar ek wil maar graag glo dat hy my herken en roep om my aandag te trek! Volgens navorsing is hulle 'n relatiewe stil voël en roep slegs as hul naby hul nes kom (hulle is eers na ouderdom van een jaar geslagsryp) of gedurende die paringstydperk – so, ek glo Little Wing roep my omdat hy my herken!

Net sommer 'n storiëtjie binne die storie – eenkeer toe ek weer so stap en "Hello Little Wing" roep, is daar toevallig iemand se werker ook in ons pad. Hy vra toe so ewe vir wie groet ek dan so en toe ek Little Wing in sy boom vir hom uitwys, sê hy so ewe "Oooh so the madam knows him!" Ek moes maar my lag sluk en het hom toe net vertel dat dit 'n baie "goeie" voël is wat "al" die slange vang so ons moet mooi na hulle kyk.

Ek is so bly ek het die afgelope broeiseisoen die moeite gedoen (en was ook gelukkig genoeg gewees!) om 'n fotorekord saam te stel vanaf die paring tot Henrietta op die nes; ou Little Wing se wit koppie die eerste keer bo die nes tot en met die jongeling wat heerlik bo ons Estate rondvlieg. Wie weet of hulle wel weer gaan terugkeer vir 'n volgende broeiseisoen? Ek is van plan om 'n bladsy op die webwerf aan hierdie hele storie te wy. Dit sal apart van die Our Eagles bladsy wees, want op die oomblik is die foto's (die wat ons wel geplaas het, ek het hope mooi foto's!) versprei oor 'n paar Celtis uitgawes en ek sou dit graag saam op een bladsy wou sit. Hou die spasie gerus dop!

So van voëls gepraat, ons het nou al twee keer aasvoëls taamlik laag oor die Estate sien vlieg. Garfield het wel 'n foto of twee kon kry – nie sy gewone uitstekende foto's nie, want teen die tyd dat hy sy kamera en lense en weet-nie-wat bymekaar kon kry was hulle al taamlik ver en hoog, maar mens kon darem hul eien as Kransaasvoëls!



Kransaaivoël (*Gyps coprotheres*) (foto Garfield Krige)

Ons het gewonder of hulle dalk van die Aasvoëlrestaurant naby Hartebeespoort is en kontak gemaak met Kerri van die Aasvoëlprojek. Volgens haar kom voer hul glo al die afgelope dertig jaar by die Rhino & Lionpark en daar is glo ook 'n drinkplek naby die Sterkfonteingrotte wat hulle gebruik – sommer op ons voorstoep!

Natuurlik word die arme diere se voortbestaan weereens bedreig deur die mens – mense gebruik die arme goed as muti en sommige boere sien hul as 'n vyand en vergiftig hulle! Aasvoëls vrek gereeld as hulle aan 'n perdekarkas vreet. Dit gebeur wanneer 'n perd met anti-inflammatoriese medikasie behandel is - dit is dodelik vir aasvoëls! Dit terwyl hulle wonderlike en nuttige diere is. Elke ding in die natuur is daar om 'n spesifieke balans te help handhaaf – die uitroei van een spesie het ook 'n uitkringende, nadelige uitwerking op die voortbestaan van 'n hele paar ander.

Ons kan almal regtig iets doen vir bewaring al is dit nou ook nie net op ons Estate nie. Gaan loer gerus op Kerri-hul se wonderlike, leersame en interessante webwerf www.Vulpro.com . Neem jou kinders vir 'n wonderlike en leersame uitstappie na die sentrum in 'n skoolvakansie of op 'n Sondag - doen iets! Ons moet ons kinders bewaringsbewus maak – as jy as ouer dit nie doen, wie gaan? Ondersteun die mense, neem 'n aasvoël aan, skenk 'n paar rand – versprei die woord, elkeen kan iets doen vir die voortbestaan van hierdie spesie en ander.

Kyk bietjie die mooi foto van 'n reënboog wat Carina Dispan gestuur het – dis nie aldag wat die lug so mooi en helder is met nog 'n pasella van 'n reënboog daarby nie!



(Foto Carina Dispan SCE143)



Nog een van ons mooi veldblomme, *Maclidium zeyheri* (Foto Elmarie Krige)



Hierdie mooi veldblom is die Wilde Violtjie/Wild Violet (*Polygala uncinata*) (Foto Elmarie Krige)

Nou-ja, dis tyd om te groet - geniet die voorreg wat ons het om in die Cradle te woon. So baie mense beny ons vir ons stukkie paradys, hier in die wêrelderfenisgebied. Kyk op julle plotte rond of julle nie ook van ons mooi veldblomme raaksien nie en laat ons elkeen probeer om iets te bewaar van dit wat ons eintlik verniet gekry het!

Totsiens, goodbye, adios, ciao, yia sas en do svidaniya!

