

Celtis africana

Sterkfontein Country Estates January/Januarie 2016

Good day to all the Celtis friends!

Here we are at the beginning of another new year and I hope it will be a great one with few challenges and lots of happiness and good health to all of you. As someone once said: May all your troubles last as long as your New Year's resolutions!

One of the challenges we do face and can do very little about is the drought. It saddened us to see, when driving through the Free State recently, that the veld looked bare and dead – worse than in winter. Fields lying unattended and dormant as farmers could not plant anything. This is something that will eventually affect all of us with higher food prices, etc.

It is so bad at the moment that there is an initiative whereby anyone passing through the Free State Province is asked to either bring some water (even just one bottle of water helps!) and drop it off at certain points in the Free State or pick up tanks of water (if they have space) at certain points along the way and drop it off in the Free State. And yes, a bottle DOES make a difference – it is drinking water for one person in an old aged home etc. We, who are lucky enough to have access to consistent borehole water, cannot really envision the true state of the situation!

On a lighter topic, one of the cuter inhabitants of our Estate is the ground squirrel (*Xerus inauris*). Have a look at the cute, I-want-to-take-one-of-them-home photo that Jenny Johnson (SCE 126) has sent me! These little guys happily co-exist with the mongoose and mole rats, all making underground burrows. A case of: we are neighbours, yes, but we won't bother you, so don't bother us – some human beings can certainly take a leaf from their book!

These little mammals live mainly on seeds and plants and will also dig up roots and underground bulbs to eat. They have an average lifespan of about 15 years. They can have up to three litters annually of as many as three young (although the average is 1-2). They occur in the more arid parts of southern Africa but not in coastal areas. They are **not** the same as the tree squirrels we find in Cape Town, etc, which are not indigenous.

In the veld, and despite the drought, there are, amazingly, still plants flowering! On our Estate we have three species of the lovely Ipomoeas in flower at the moment. We have the *Ipomoea crassipes* (hairy leaves) the *Ipomoea bolusiana* (note the leaves are straight and narrow) and also the *Ipomoea ommaneyi* (with longer almost triangular-shaped kind of leaves) – have a look at the photos.

The other day I was busy inside, when Garfield called me very excitedly from where he was busy watering the garden. And there, hopping along on the ground playing hide and seek amongst the grasses were the two of most beautiful little birds I have

seen in a long time. I said to Garfield it couldn't be local birds they are so brightly coloured and they did not seem to be too wild – I was sure they must have escaped from someone's cage!

Well, was I wrong! We both dashed inside to get our cameras to take some photos of these never-before-seen-on-our-Estate cuties. Of course, Garfield's photos (having the better camera with all the lenses and paraphernalia!) are just better. It was quite a mission, because they are busy little things, hopping around under shrubs, amongst the grasses pecking here, flying off there and so on. We eventually identified it as the Blue Waxbill (*Uraeginthus angolensis*), also called the Blue-breasted cordon-bleu. It was feeding happily on the seeds of some grasses whilst "chatting" to each other.

The blue waxbill feeds mainly on grasses and seeds, supplemented by insects, termites and caterpillars and is very dependant on water. They are only about 12cm long (head to tip-of-tail) and weight is between 8 and 12 grams – a teeny little thing! They breed mainly from December to May and the nest, which is built by both sexes, is built from green, flowering grass stems and lined with feathers. It looks like a small round ball and has a short spout-like entrance on the side and can usually be found in an acacia.

Between 2 and seven eggs are laid and are incubated by both parents. The chicks are hatched after about 12 days. Apparently this is quite a common bird and during breeding season occurs in pairs. Outside of breeding season they can be seen in swarms of forty at a time. Well, we hope they were not casual visitors and that we may see them again as they are really quite beautiful.

Just for fun:

"My New Year's resolution is to eat better – so, from now on, I'm going to only date guys who can afford to take me somewhere other than McDonalds."
- *Melanie White*

Until next time, have a great January and let us all hope and pray for much-needed rain.



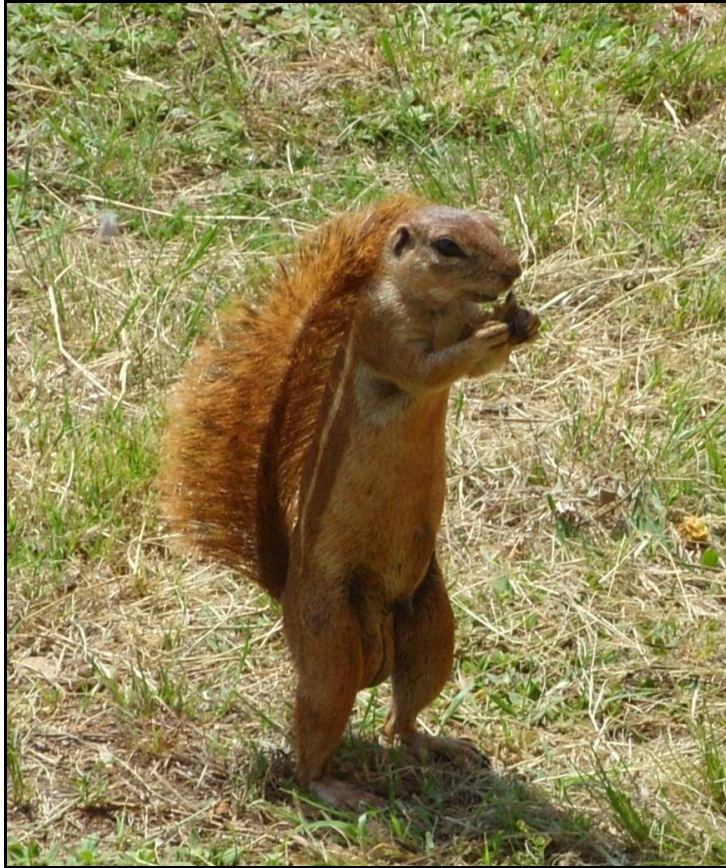
Blue Waxbill/Gewone Blousysie (photos: Garfield Krige)





Blue Waxbill busy eating grass seeds - note the "hairy-like" feathers. Gewone Blousysie besig om grassadjies te eet. Let op die veertjies se harige voorkoms (photos: Garfield Krige)





Ground Squirrel/Grondeekhoring (photo: Jenny Johnson SCE126)



***Ipomoea crassipes* (hairy leaves)** (photo: Elmarie Krige)



Ipomoea bolusiana (note the leaves are straight and narrow) (cell phone photo: Elmarie Krige)



Ipomoea ommaneyi (with longer almost triangular-shaped kind of leaves) (cell phone photo: Elmarie Krige)

Goeie dag Celtis vriende!

Hier is ons aan die begin van nog 'n nuwe jaar en ek hoop dit gaan 'n goeie een vol geluk en goeie gesondheid wees vir almal en met nie **te** veel moeilike uitdagings nie. Soos iemand eenkeer gesê het, mag al jou probleme duur so lank as wat jou Nuwejaarsvoornemens duur!

Een van die groot uitdagings wat ons op die oomblik mee stoei en waaraan ons nie veel kan doen nie, is die erge droogte in ons land. Ons het onlangs deur die Vrystaat gery en dit was hartseer om die droë, vaal veld te sien en ons onself daaraan moes herinner dat dit nie winter is nie – want dit het so gelyk! Die landerye lê droog en onbewerk – die boere kon niks plant nie. Dis iets wat ons almal uiteindelik gaan affekteer met goed soos hoër kospryse, ens.

Daar is selfs op die oomblik 'n inisiatief aan die gang waarby mense gevra word om, as hul deur die Vrystaat Provinsie ry, hulle water by sekere punte kan aflaai vir verspreiding by plekke waar die nood regtig groot is. En ja, self een bottel water kan 'n verskil maak vir iemand in bv 'n ouetehuis, die stryd word gewen met die klein dingetjies! Ek dink van ons wat gelukkig genoeg is om toegang tot volhoubare boorgate het, besef nie regtig **hoe** groot die nood werklik is nie!

Op ligter noot, een van die ouliker “inwoners” op ons Estate is die waaierstertmeerkat. Nou hierdie volksnaam is totaal verkeerd, want dis glad nie 'n meerkat nie, maar eerder 'n eekhoring en daarom ook die ander, beter, naam van grondeekhoring (*Xerus inauris*). Kyk tog die oulike, ek-wil-ene-huis-toe-vaat foto wat Jenny Johnson (SCE 126) gestuur het. Die outjies woon heel lekker saam met die molle en die witkwasmuishonde (rooi meerkatte) in hul ondergrondse gate en tunnels sonder baklei. Dis 'n geval van: ja, ons is bure, maar los my uit en ek los jou uit – iets wat die mensdom nie altyd verstaan en toepas nie!

Hierdie soogdiertjies leef hoofsaaklik van sade en plante en sal ook ondergrondse wortels en bolle uitgrou om van te eet. Hulle leeftydperk is ongeveer 15 jaar. Hulle kan tot 3 keer per jaar broei en kan tot drie kleintjies op 'n keer hê, alhoewel een tot twee meer die norm is. Die grondeekhoring kom voor in die droër gedeeltes van suidelike Afrika maar kom nie kuslans voor nie. Let wel, hulle is **nie** dieselfde as die boomekhorings (wat uitheems is!) wat bv in Kaapstad voorkom nie.

In ons veld, en ten spyte van die erge droogte, is daar steeds heelwat plante wat tog blom! Op ons Estate is daar byvoorbeeld drie van die *Ipomoea* spesies wat nog blom. Daar is die *Ipomoea crassipes* (met harige blare) die *Ipomoea bolusiana* (die blare is dun regop en smal) en dan ook die *Ipomoea ommaneyi* (met langer en groter, amper driehoekige vorm blare) – kyk na die verskillende foto's.

Nou die ander dag terwyl ek binne besig is, roep Garfield my heel opgewonde waar hy besig is om die tuin nat te spuit. En daar, tussen die veldgras al hoppende en “geselsend” is die pragtigste klein helderblou voëltjies – mooier as wat ek in 'n lang tyd gesien het. Ek sê nogals ek kan nie dink dat dit inheemse voëltjies van

hierdie area is nie, ek is seker dis iemand se kouvoëltjies wat ontsnap het – hulle het glad nie baie wild voorgekom nie!

En was ek nou verkeerd! Ons albei is gou binne toe om ons kameras te kry ingeval een van ons dalk gelukkig genoeg is om 'n mooi foto te kry. Natuurlik het Garfield die beter kamera met al die lense en goete en het hy, ten spyte van die feit dat die outjies heel woelig is en tussen die gras en veldstruik rondhop en opvlieg, wel 'n paar pragtige foto's kon kry. Ons kon dit toe uiteindelik identifiseer as die Gewone Blousysie (*Uraeginthus angolensis*). Die tweetjies is toe besig om grondlangs te hop en elke nou-en-dan 'n grassaadje te eet terwyl hul hul kenmerkende geluidjies maak.

Die blousysie leef hoofsaaklik van grasse en sade maar vul ook hul dieet aan met insekte, termiete en ruspes en is baie afhanklik van water. Hulle is maar slegs sowat 12 cm lank (dis nou van kop tot stertpunt) en weeg tussen 8 en 12 gram – sommer 'n ou klein dingetjie! Hul broeitydperk is vanaf Desember tot Mei en die nes, wat deur beide geslag gebou word, word van groen, blommende grashalms gebou en word met veertjies uitgevoer. Die nesses lyk soos 'n ronde balletjie en het 'n kort ingang aan die kant wat na 'n tuit lyk en is gewoonlik in akasiabome.

Tussen twee en sewe eiertjies word gelê en beide die mannetjie en wyfie help met die uitbroei. Kleintjies broei na sowat 12 dae uit. In die broeiseisoen kom hul gewoonlik in pare voor en buite broeiseisoen kan hul in swerms met soveel as 40 voëls op 'n slag rondvlieg. Ons hoop regtig hulle het nie net vir 'n kort kuiertjie gekom nie, maar dat ons hulle gereeld op ons Estate sal sien - hulle is regtig pragtige goedjies!

Net vir die snaaksigheid:

Die onderwyser sê vir die klas dat hy hulle kennis van wiskunde bietjie wil toets. Hy vra vir die klompie seuns: "Sê nou vir my, as Wellington 20 kilometer van die Paarl af is, hoe ver is die Paarl van Wellington af?"

Hy kyk rond in die klas, maar nie een waag 'n antwoord nie. Dit is tjoepstil in die klas. "Kom nou seuns, dis mos maklik! Kom ek herhaal dit weer vir julle. As Wellington 20 kilometer van die Paarl af is, hoe ver is die Paarl van Wellington af?"

Niemand waag 'n antwoord nie, almal bly tjoepstil. Die onderwyser besluit om vir een van die seuns direk te vra. "Jannie, vertel jy nou vir meneer die antwoord?"

Ou Jannie skud net sy kop en skop, skop met sy toon teen sy bank. "Jannie, maar dit is mos logies. As Wellington 20 kilometer van die Paarl af is, dan is die Paarl mos 20 kilometer van Wellington af. Dit spreek mos vanself!"

Jy kan eintlik hoor hoe Jannie sommetjies in sy kop maak! "Nei Meneer, dit spreek nie vanself nie. Vanaf Krismis tot Nuwejaar is 'n week, maar vanaf Nuwejaar tot Krismis is 'n moerse lang tyd!"

Tot volgende maand groet ek julle en hoop Januarie is 'n vrolike maand vir jul almal!

