

Celtis africana

Sterkfontein Country Estates July/Julie 2015

Good day Celtis friends!

Even though winter is here, we are blessed with sunny days – I don't think I could survive the cold and wet winters that is typical of the Western Cape. For the most, we have beautiful blue skies and sunny days, and if there is no nasty wind, one can walk around in short sleeves quite happily in the middle of the day!

Our veld is now covered with aloes and early in the morning when I walk the dogs on our property it does look lovely. Just a little bit of trivia about our aloes: Did you know our aloes are called *Aloe greatheadii* var. *davyana*? Aloe is from the Greek word *alsos*, which means bitter – referring to the bitter juice in the leaves. And going back even earlier, *alsos* is derived from the Arabic word, *alloeh*, meaning bitter. The *greatheadii* part is named after a Dr J.B. Greathead who co-collected the type specimen with a Dr S. Schönland. The “var” in the name stands for variety, and the *davyana* in the name is after Dr J. Burtt Davy, who was the head of the Botanical division in the then Department of Agriculture (1903). The common English name for our aloe is Spotted Aloe and in Afrikaans, the Transvaalaalwyn or grasaalwyn (the latter referring to some of its habitat).

Trials have shown this humble aloe can be used successfully as a soil binder on mine dumps. And if a bee suddenly stings you or an insect has bitten you and you are near any of these aloes, a piece of the leave can be broken off and the juice can be smeared all over the bite mark for almost instant relief. Through centuries it has been used as a medicinal plant to treat sores, wounds and burns. So even though it is maybe not the most spectacular of aloes, it has its uses and it certainly lights up an otherwise monotone veld.

Although nothing else is flowering in the veld at this time of the year, do take your time when driving on Malmani road. The bare branches of the trees certainly make a lovely picture against the backdrop of the beautiful blue of the wintry skies! There is much to love in every season and when I see these free gifts from nature, I quickly forget the cold!



Winter sky and a *Celtis africana* tree (Photo: Elmarie Krige)

As soon as last month's Celtis went out, I got e-mails from people having spotted our eagles. Adriaan Coetzee (SCE 116) told me how, when one of them were flying slowly over his property, the crowned lapwings decided this is just not on and started chasing it; screeching at the top of their lungs at it and driving it off until he could barely see it. Now I have witnessed that before – even very small birds would chase off this "enemy" and the eagle would let them! It is because although it can reach high speeds, (some sources reckon 90 Km/h or more when descending to prey!) it cannot make sudden twists and turns whilst on the wing – its size makes it a little clumsy, so it would rather back off when being harassed by much smaller birds.

I also got photos from Leon Bylsma (SCE 152) showing Henrietta with nesting material in her beak, perched on a tree in his property! I have since then seen both eagles near the old nesting site, but one must remember that the female only lays an egg anything up to ten days' after mating. So they sort the nest out first, "test-drive" it a bit and then the rest follows.



Henrietta in flight (Photo: Leon Bylsma SCE152)



Henrietta with nesting material in her beak (Photo: Leon Bylsma SCE152)

We often see Henrietta on her nest in Leon's property, while driving past on Malmani Rd, so it seems that there are things happening! But one has to look very carefully to try and spot her. The moment she sees a car or pedestrian, she does her

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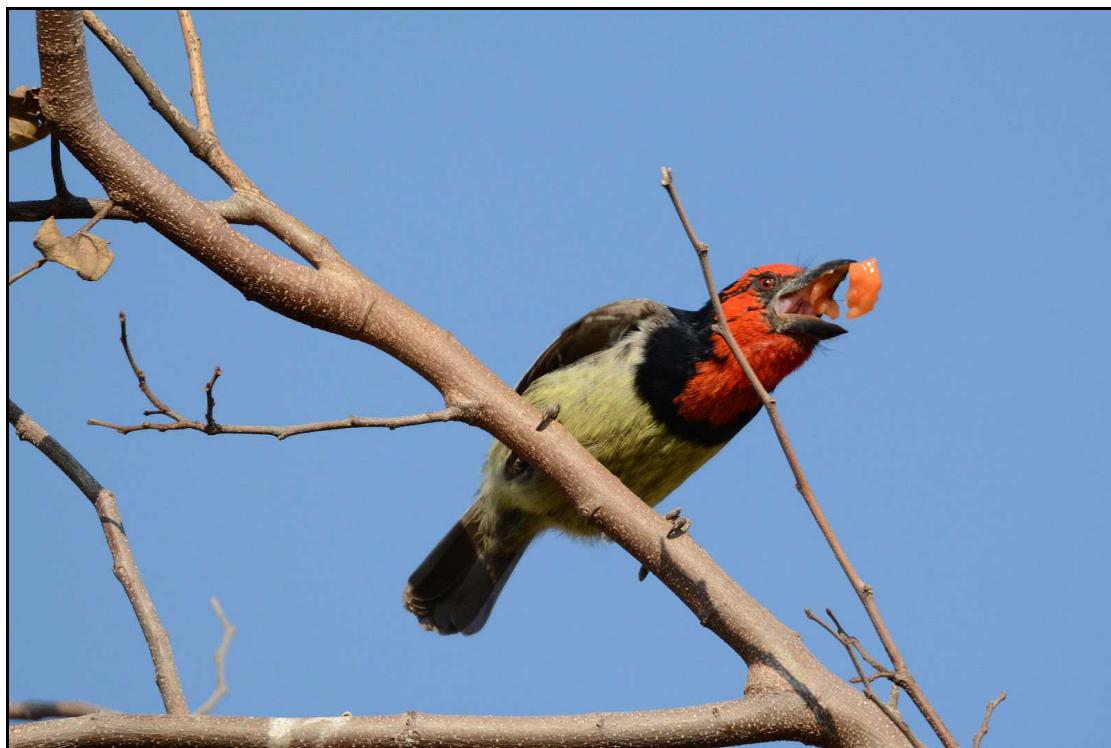
usual duck-and-dive trick. All things considered, we should have a new chick end of August, beginning September, depending on when the egg was actually laid. I am very happy the eagles chose Leon's property as a nesting site; he lives a very quiet life. He does not own any dogs that might scare them off and the nest is also a safe distance from the road as well. So let's hold thumbs for another healthy eagle chick!

Last month we showed you photos of some of the birds that flock to our courtyard for some titbits when food becomes a bit scarcer during winter. Garfield witnessed something really funny. One of the Southern Fiscals decided it had better also stock up on provisions, dived down, grabbed a piece of bread and "saved" it for the proverbial rainy day on the thorn of one of our acacias! Have a look at the photo – not the best of photos as it was taken with his cell phone, but it is just **so** interesting to see how clever Mother Nature's children are, so I had to add it! See the photo in the Afrikaans section.

Winter also brings a lot of birds to our garden, as they love the fruit I put out for them with food becoming scarcer in nature.



My "hairdo" looks just like Albert Einstein's, and I'm just as smart! Grey Go-away-bird (Photo: Garfield Krige)



An action photo of a Black-collared Barbet with a piece of pawpaw (Photo: Garfield Krige)

Of course June was a wonderful month for stargazing and although not exclusive to our Estate, it was great to watch how Venus and Jupiter moved closer together until they appeared almost merged. I forgot about this phenomenon until Carina Dispan (SCE 143) phoned me and reminded me to have a look! The two planets move past each other every year, but this year the illusion of the two planets being close together was especially striking.

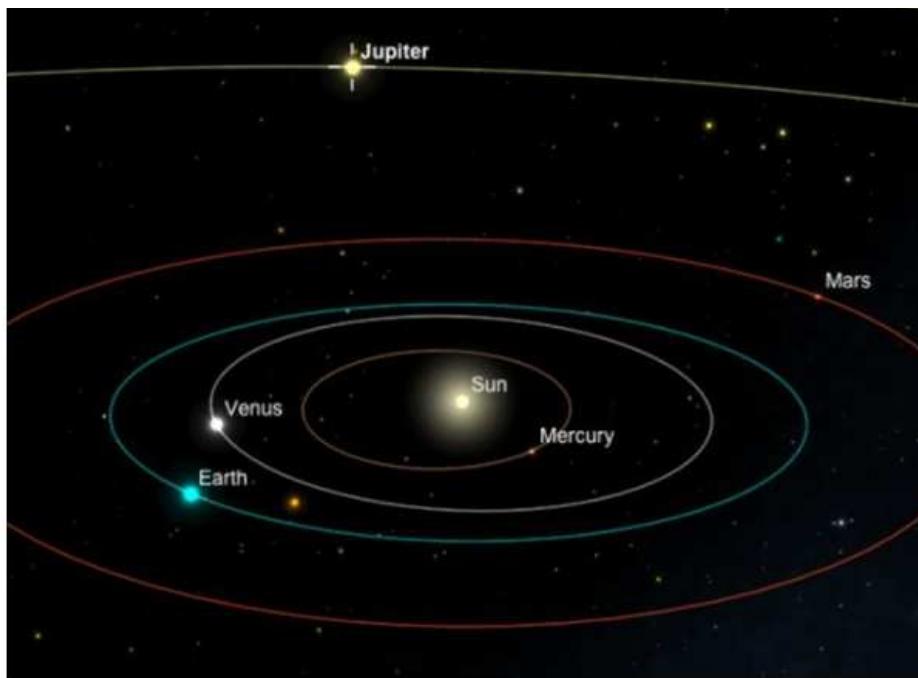
Garfield took some photos and one can even see three of Jupiter's 67 moons on the photo! (Jupiter's four large moons are referred to as the Galilean Moons). In the photo, Venus appears much brighter than Jupiter, even though it's only a tenth of its size. This is because Venus is covered with highly reflective white clouds and is also much closer to Earth. It's about 90 Million Km away, while Jupiter is much further away - some 890 Million Km. So their apparent proximity to each other (and their sizes) is just an optical illusion. It is almost unbelievable that a modern digital camera, albeit using a 600mm lens, captured some of Jupiter's moons, something virtually impossible only a decade or so ago.

Of particular interest is the distance Jupiter's moons had moved in just one night. When comparing the photograph on page 6, taken on 30/06/2015, with the one in the Afrikaans section on page 11, taken the following night (01/07/2015), one immediately notices that even though there were two moons below Jupiter in the 30th June picture and only one above it, these positions have now been swapped in the 1st July picture, with two above and only one below Jupiter.

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Venus (bottom left) and Jupiter (right) with three of its moons (Photo: Garfield Krige 30/06/2015)



This simulated orbital view of the solar system shows the relative positions of Venus and Jupiter and why both planets appear close together for observers located on Earth.

ILLUSTRATION BY A.FAZEKAS, SKYSAFARI

This illusion is clearly illustrated in the graphic above, copied from the National Geographic website: (http://news.nationalgeographic.com/2015/06/150629-spot-venus-jupiter-conjunction-sky/?utm_source=Facebook&utm_medium=Social&utm_content=link_fb20150630news-venusjupiter&utm_campaign=Content&sf10464562=1).

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This specific phenomenon will only occur again on the first of March 2023!

Us country bumpkins can of course see these types of phenomena more clearly out here where there are not so many city lights to spoil things like that!

From aloes to birds and all the way to astronomy - I hope you enjoyed this edition of the Celtis! Stay warm and enjoy nature!

Just for fun:

What sits at the bottom of the cold Arctic Ocean and shivers?

A nervous wreck!

How do you know you really belong in Benoni?

When you think Dom Perignon is a Mafioso Boss!

Goeie dag Celtis vriende!

Ten spyte daarvan dat dit winter is, het ons darem oor die algemeen sonnige dae – ek dink nie ek sal die koue en nat winters, so tipies van die Wes-Kaap, oorleef nie! As daar nie 'n koue wind is nie kan ons meeste dae in die middel van die dag met kortmou klere rondloop!

Die veld is nou oortrek van die aalwyne in volle blom en soggens vroeg as ek met my honde gaan stap lyk dit regtig mooi in die vroegoggend lig.

Wat van so bietjie trivia oor ons aalwyne! Hierdie spesifieke aalwyn word die *Aloe greatheadii* var. *davyana* genoem. Die woord “aloe” is van die Griekse woord *alsos* wat “bitter” beteken, wat natuurlik verwys na die bitter sap in die blare. Om nog verder terug te gaan na die woord se oorsprong – *alsos* is afkomstig van die Arabiese woord, *alloeh*, wat ook “bitter” beteken.

Die *greatheadii* gedeelte is vernoem na ‘n Dr J. B. Greathead wat saam met ‘n Dr S. Schönland voorbeeld van die plant help versamel het. Die “var.” in die naam staan vir variasie en die *davyana* - gedeelte is vernoem na Dr J Burtt Davy, die hoof van die Botaniese afdeling van die destydse Departement van Landbou (1903). Die algemene Afrikaanse naam is die Transvaalaalwyn of grasaalwyn, laasgenoemde verwysend na die plant se habitat.

Studies het bewys dat hierdie nederige ou aalwyntjie baie goed vaar om grond as’t ware te bind waar dit baie versteur is soos byvoorbeeld op mynhope. En as ‘n by of ander insek jou gesteek of gebyt het en jy is naby een van die plante, kan jy net vinnig ‘n stukkie blaar afbreek en oor die plek vryf vir feitlik onmiddellike verligting. Dit word al honderde jare as ‘n medisinale plant gebruik in die behandeling van sere, brandplekke en ander wonde. So, al is dit nou nie een van hierdie besonderse aalwyne wat mens laat "oee" en "aa" nie, het dit beslis gebruiken en dit bring kleur in ons andersins vaal winterveld!

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Alhoewel niks anders huis blom die tyd van die jaar nie, is die kaal takke van die bome afgeteken teen die lieflike Hoëveldse blou lug tog iets om te sien. Ry so bietjie stadiger op Malmani en bekyk die mooi van winter – mens vergeet sommer van die koue!

Verlede maand se *Celtis* was skaars uitgestuur, of ek kry terugvoer van heelwat mense oor ons arende! Adriaan Coetzee (SCE 116) vertel my hoe verbaas hy was toe hy een van die arende op 'n dag taamlik laag oor sy eiendom sien vlieg. Die kroonkiewiete het niks hiervan gehou en luidkeels hul misnoeë te kenne gegee. Al krysend het hul die arend begin jaag en agterna gesit - hoog die lug in totdat hy (Adriaan) die spulletjie amper nie eers meer kon sien nie! Nouja dit het ek al voorheen gesien – selfs baie klein voëltjies het hierdie "vyand" baie gou verjaag as dit naby hul nesarea rondgesit het. En die arend laat dit maar toe! Dis natuurlik maar omdat, alhoewel hulle 'n baie hoë spoed kan bereik, (sommige bronne beweer dat hulle selfs 90kpu en meer kan bereik as hulle afduik na prooi!) hulle weens hul grootte, taamlik lomp is. Hulle kan nie skielik swenk en duik agter 'n kleiner voëltjie wat hulle sou verjaag nie. So dis vir hulle net makliker om maar die aftog te blaas!

Leon Bylsma (SCE 152) het my ook foto's gestuur wat duidelik wys dat Henrietta nesmateriaal in haar bek het. Die is geneem waar hulle doenig was in 'n boom op sy plot. Kyk bietjie in die Engelse gedeelte na sy foto's. Ek het die paar wel agterna 'n paar keer saam sien sit naby die ou nesarea, maar mens moet onthou dat, nadat paring plaas gevind het, tot soveel as tien dae kan verloop voordat die bevrugte eier gelê word! So hul sorteer eers die nes uit, toetsbestuur dit so 'n bietjie en dan volg die res.

As alles goed gaan behoort ons 'n nuwe arendkuiken Augustus/September se kant te hê – alles hang natuurlik af van presies wanneer die eier gelê is! Ons het al paar maal in die verbyry Henrietta op die nes gesien, maar mens moet baie fyn kyk; die oomblik wat 'n kar of verbyganger in die area is doen sy haar gewone wegsak-en-verdwyn storie!

Ek is natuurlik baie bly hulle het besluit om 'n nes op Leon se eiendom te maak; hy is 'n stil inwoner en het nie honde of ander diere wat die arende kan verskrik of versteur nie. Dis ook 'n veilige entjie van Malmani af, so daar is nie kans dat verbygangers die voëls kan pla nie.

Verlede maand het ek foto's geplaas van die voëls wat laatmiddag 'n happie kom soek as ek my honde kosgee. Nou die dag moes ek lag: ek het skaars stukkies brood vir die kiewiete en dikkoppe uitgegooi toe Garfield my kom vertel 'n laksman het besluit hy moet darem ietsie vir die spens kry. 'n Stuk brood is gegryp en netjies op een van die akacias se dorings "gebêre" vir die spreekwoordelike maer jare! Die foto is nie te waffers nie, Garfield het net sy selfoon byderhand gehad, maar ek **moes** dit net insit om te bewys hoe oulik en slim Moeder Natuur se kinders is!

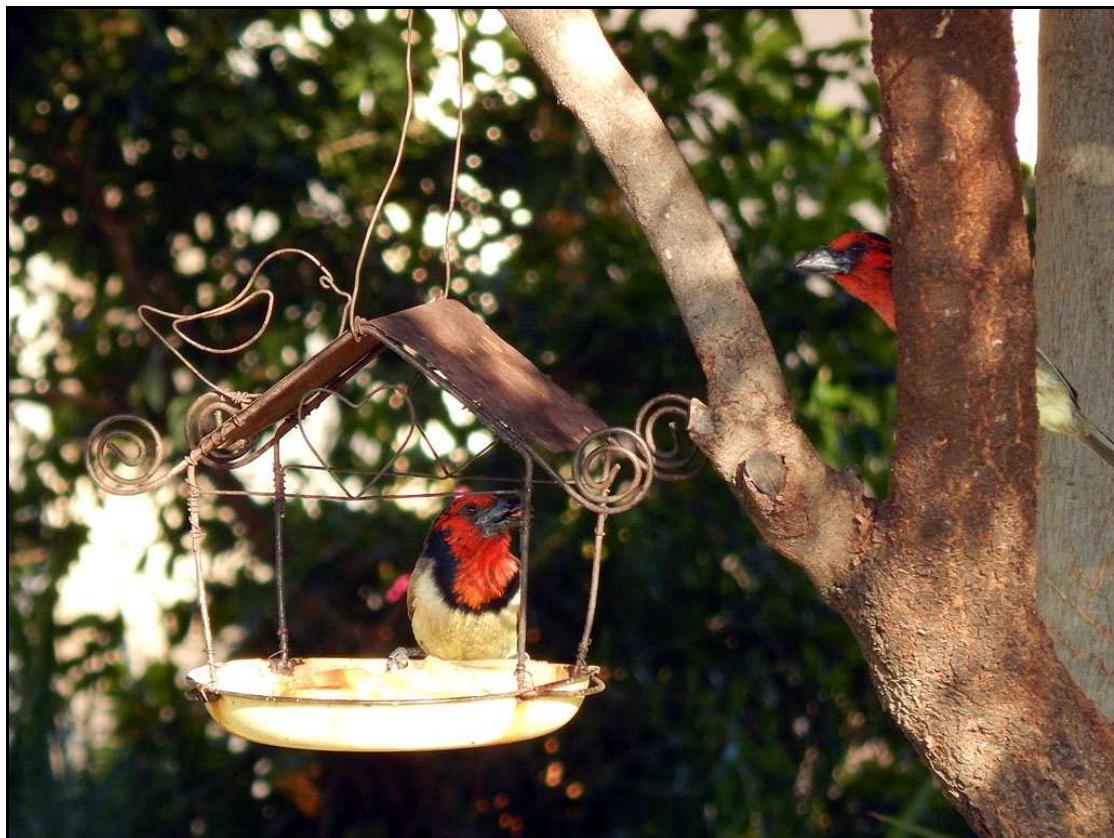


Die geel pyltjie wys na die stukkie brood in die laksman se "spens" (Selfoon foto: Garfield Krige)

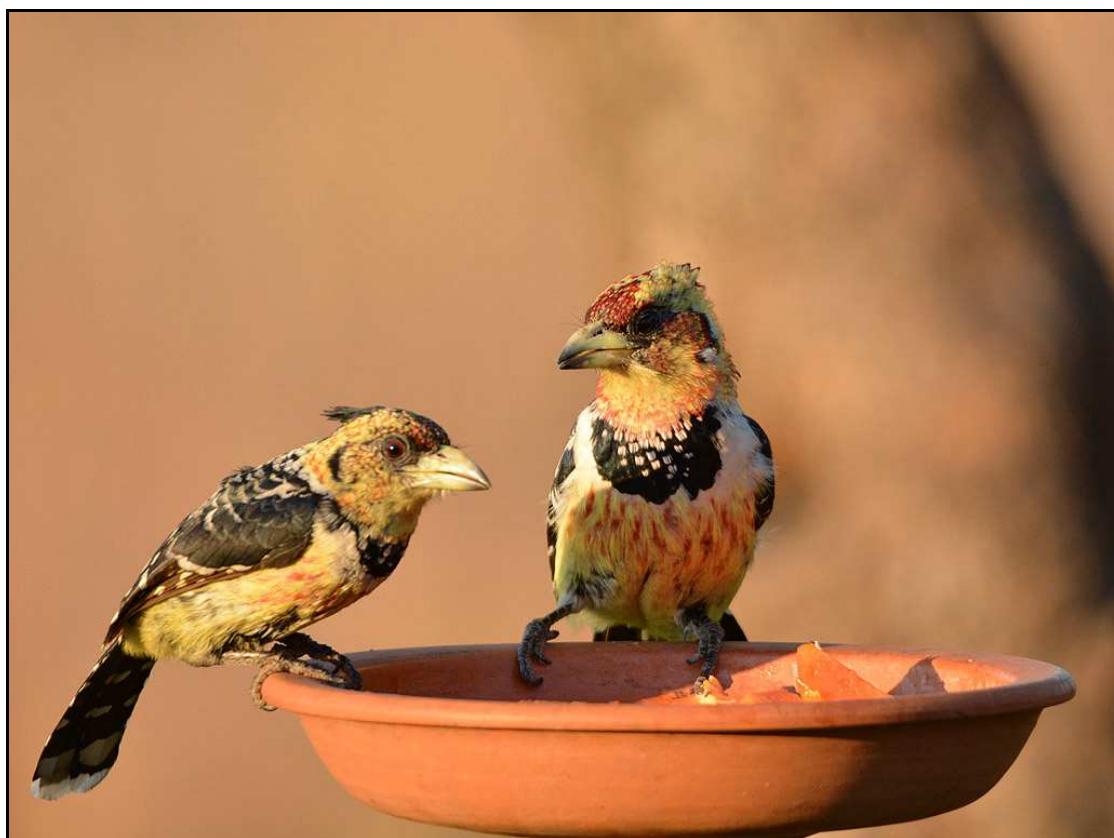
Ander voëls besoek ook graag ons tuin in die winter wanneer kos skaars raak in die natuur. 'n Ekstra happie vrugte of saad is altyd welkom!



Muisvoëls veg om 'n happie papaja en lemoen (Foto: Garfield Krige)



"Wat kyk jy?" Rooikophoutkappers geniet die vrugtefees (Foto: Elmarie Krige)

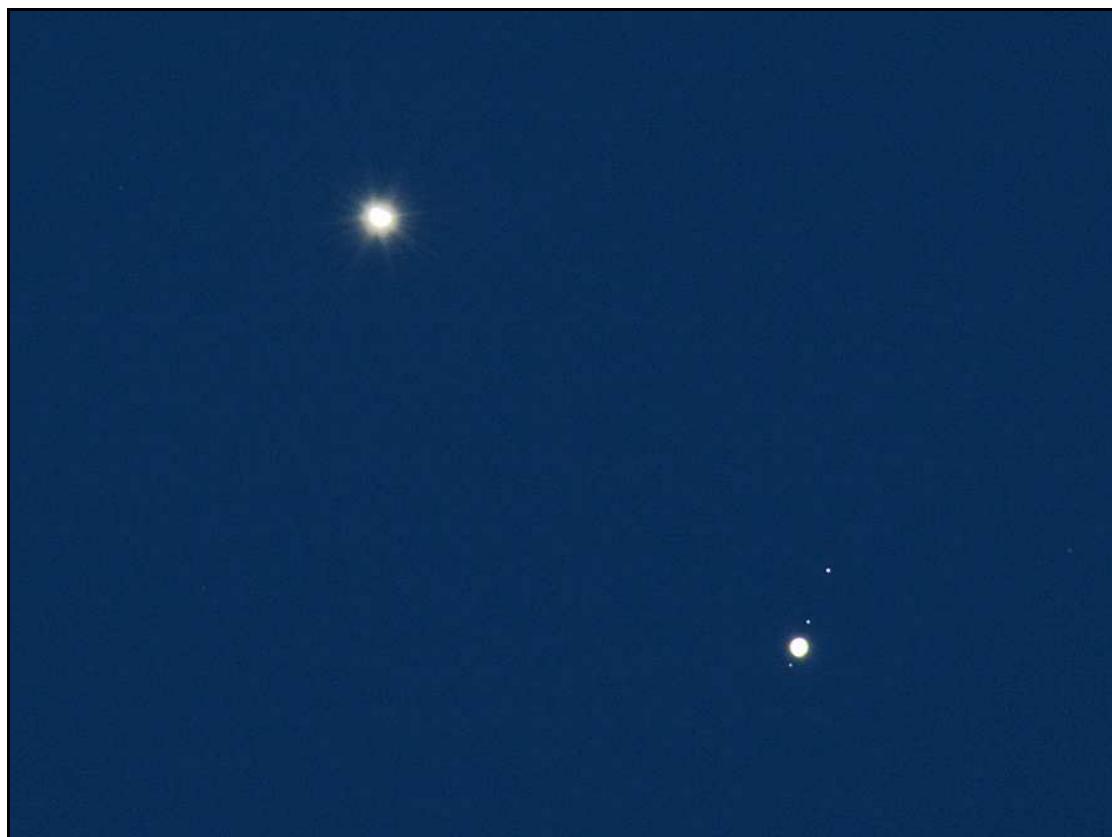


"Jammer liefie, dit was die laaste happie!" Kuifkophoutkappermannetjie (middel) en -wyfie (links) (Foto: Garfield Krige)

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Juniemaand was natuurlik 'n wonderlike maand vir almal wat in sterrekyk geïnteresseerd is! Hierdie jaar veral het Venus en Jupiter gelyk asof hulle so naby aan mekaar verby beweeg dat dit op 'n kol gelyk het asof hulle een groot ster is. Ek het amper van die storie vergeet tot Carina Dispan (SCE 143) my een aand gebel en herinner het! Die planete beweeg elke jaar verby mekaar, maar hierdie spesifieke illusie kom eers weer voor op 1 Maart 2023! Alhoewel Venus heelwat helderder vertoon as gevolg van sy (haar) reflektiewe wolke en ook omdat Venus baie nader aan die aarde is as Jupiter, is Jupiter eintlik die grootste planeet in ons sonnestelsel. Jupiter is omtrent twaalf keer groter is as Venus. So die nabyheid is net 'n illusie. Venus is omtrent 90 Miljoen Km van die aarde af, terwyl Jupiter 'n massieve 890 Miljoen Km van ons af is.

Ons maan het ook 'n rol gespeel; een van die aande was daar 'n perfekte driehoek gevorm tussen die twee planete en die maan. Garfield het 'n paar foto's geneem en mens kan selfs drie van Jupiter se 67 mane op die foto's sien! Ons wat hier buite die stad met sy helder ligte woon, is baie gelukkig – mens kan sulke tipe verskynsels altyd baie duideliker sien as die stadsjapies!



Venus (links bo) en Jupiter (regs onder). Drie van Jupiter se mane is duidelik sigbaar in die foto
(Foto: Garfield Krige 01/07/2015)

Wat veral interessant is, is die afstand wat Jupiter se mane beweeg het in net een aand. Op die foto in die Engelse deel (bl 6), is daar een maan bokant Jupiter en twee onder hom. Op hierdie foto, net die volgende aand, is daar 2 mane bokant Jupiter en net een onder hom.

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Nouja van aalwyne en voëls tot sterrekunde – ek hoop julle het hierdie maand se Celtis baie interessant gevind!

Net vir die grap:

Hoe weet jy jy hoort regtig in Benoni?

1. Jou kar se boekwaarde verander na gelang hoe vol die petroltenk is!

2. As jy meer karre het wat op bakstene staan as wat wiele het!

Tot volgende maand, bly warm en geniet die natuur!

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

