

Celtis africana

Sterkfontein Country Estates

June/Junie 2015

Good day Celtis friends!

And suddenly winter put her icy hands down my neck on Monday! Tuesday morning was freezing and even a few small patches of the first frost in the veld when I went for my early morning walk with the dogs! On Sunday (31 May) we were still commenting on what a lovely warm day it was for end of May; feeling sorry for the brave Comrades runners who suffered the heat to challenge their endurance and stamina! One guy actually ran the whole race backwards just because he loves bees and want to focus attention to their importance as a species – THAT needs some doing! And then suddenly, Monday it all changed - nasty winds, some clouds and we even had a few drops of rain at night. But, it is June and there is no way escaping the seasonal changes! At least the rain helped a bit to wash the dust off plants.



"Yaaawn... Winter is so boring..." Speckled Mouse Bird (Photo: Garfield Krige)

Wintertime also means that most of our wonderful flora goes into a bit of a hiatus and not too much is going on in the veld. But this is the time when veld fires – whether we like them or not, help with the dispersion of seeds - a lot of plants in our grassland biome needs fire for their existence! At least we have our aloes to bring

much-needed colour to the otherwise monotone veld. Some are still wondering if they should stick their heads out, whilst others jumped at the chance to be the first to light up the veld. Soon open spaces will be covered with their lovely orangey-pink spears.



Aloe bud and (next photo) in full bloom (Photos: Elmarie Krige)

We often see Henrietta sitting in a tree near the old nesting site – maybe she is wondering when “their” tree will stand upright again! . Just yesterday, coming from town, we saw her riding the wind, swerving, turning, soaring and sometimes hovering over patches where prey might be – a wonderful sight! I have also seen the pair flying above the Estate a few times, but we have not been able to see where their new nesting site is. However we feel sure it is still in our area, even if not on the Estate itself, if we see them that regularly. As long as they are safe and still around, I am happy! A friend who is part of the Black Eagle Support group, have told me the breeding pair in the Rietspruit Nature Reserve have been seen mating and also building a nest. Of course there is ample food around that area and as it is a nature reserve, they are more protected to go about their business, undisturbed by urbanisation, traffic and too many humans.

Often one hears a birdcall in the garden and if one does not see the actual bird, it is an almost impossible task to identify it. With the Roberts’ Bird guide DVD we have, there are ways of identifying birds such as first looking at the size of the bird, whether it is a ground scraper or not, the form of the beak etc, but if you don’t actually see the bird, one has to try and identify it by its call. Imagine trying to listen to every single birdcall to try and identify it – it can be a very long process and almost impossible!

Late one afternoon whilst outside, I heard a very loud and distinctive call on our property in the veld area, just behind the garden. Some pigeons, starlings, sparrows as well as fiscals were to be seen doing its final late afternoon round-up for munchies, but I did not see any birds I have not seen before in any of our trees. I figured it to be coming from some sort of ground-scraper bird. Garfield was on the other side of the plot busy with the security camera, but on his return he asked me

whether I heard the birdcall too! So it was quite loud! So now how does one identify it, as none of us has actually seen it!

But luck was definitely on our side! As he went into the Roberts' guide and on to ground birds, the very first bird he clicked on was the right one! It turned out to be the Coqui Francolin (*Peliperdix coqui*)!

So far we have identified the Orange River Francolin (*Scleroptila levaillantoides*) as well as the Crested Francolin (*Dendroperdix sephaena*) in our area. To be able to add another bird to the existing list of birds of our area is always a nice bonus! This is the smallest of the francolins in South Africa and since that afternoon, we have heard them on a regular basis near our garden. But seen? We have not been so lucky! They are small and so well camouflaged that however hard we have tried; we have not been lucky enough to get a photo!

The Coqui Francolin is the smallest of the francolins. It mainly feeds on above ground food such as seeds, shoots and small fruits. To a lesser extent it feeds on underground corms and bulbs, using mainly its bill, rather than scratching the soil with its legs as most other francolins do, to get to the food. Like their cousins, they enjoy eating insects as well. The nest is a shallow hollow, lined with grass and extremely well hidden amongst grass knolls.

Today Garfield took a photo of a stork but it was so far, he could not identify it, he could just see it had a straight beak and a wattle. After downloading the photos we identified it as a Marabou stork (*Leptoptilos crumeniferus*) which, according the Roberts Bird guide is near threatened. It is so nice spot a bird like that in our area! Garfield also took some lovely photos of both the male as well as the female Amethyst sunbird (*Chalcomitra amethystina*). See photos in Afrikaans section.

This time of the year, late afternoons we always have a bit of fun. Around 17h00 the lapwings will start shrieking at our courtyard gate, knowing very well this is dinnertime for my dogs. Food becomes a bit scarcer and they love a piece of bread before nightfall. Of course the thick knees are there too, waiting for their share, as well as lots of other birds. The funniest are the thick knees. They have such an awkward way of running and will always grab the biggest pieces, running off to gobble it down and then come back for more. Although quite a bit bigger than the lapwings, they are quite wary of them and won't go near where they are. Some weird kind of pecking order!



We've all come for the feast! (Photo: Elmarie Krige)

This is all for this month – keep warm; this is the season for curries and soup, red wine and biltong, so enjoy!

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Just for fun:

Q: What do you call a group of penguins in the North Pole?

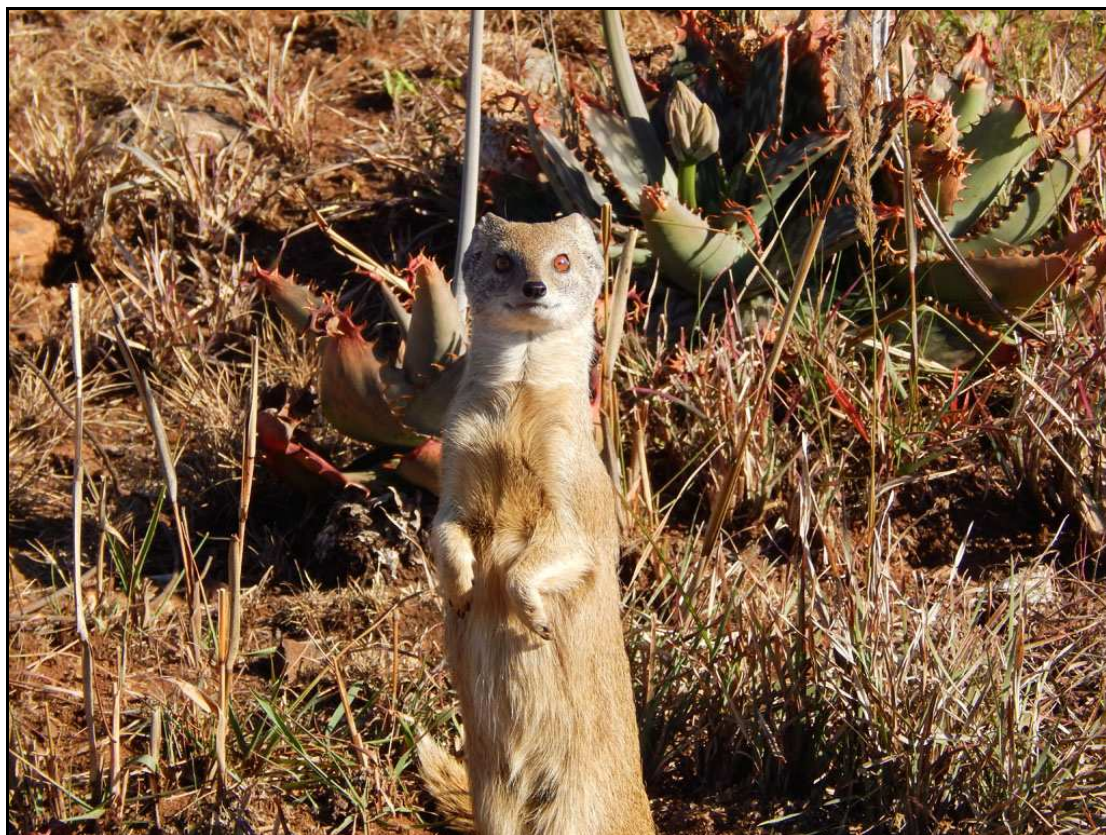
A: Lost, REALLY lost!

Goeie dag Celtis vriende!

Maandagoggend het die winter haar ysige hande in my nek gesteek en ek moet erken ek is nie mal daaroor nie! Dinsdagoggend was daar sowaar bietjie ryp plek-plek in die veld toe ek vroeg met die honde gaan stap het! En net Sondag nog het ons gesê die dag was lieflik en warm vir einde Mei; en die arme Comrades atlete bejammer wat in die hitte hulle ding doen om hul uithou vermoë te toets. Een deelnemer het glads die hele wedloop agteruit gedoen – alles omdat hy so baie van bye hou en om mense se aandag op die insek as 'n spesie te vestig. DIT wil gedoen word sowaar! En Maandag verander alles skielik met nare winde, 'n paar wolkies en gisteraand selfs 'n paar reëndruppels! Ten minste het dit die stof van die plante

afgewas. Maar nou-ja, dit is immers Junie en mens moet maar die seisoensveranderinge omhels, of ons wil of nie!

Gedurende die winter is daar min van ons mooi flora te sien en die veld is maar taamlik kleurloos en vaal. Natuurlik moet sekere plante ook 'n ruskans kry. Winter is natuurlik ook die tyd van veldbrande en of ons daarvan hou of nie, dit is 'n belangrike gebeurtenis in ons grasland bioom. Baie van ons flora se voorbestaan is afhanklik van veldbrande aangesien dit die enigste manier is om sade te laat ontwikkel. Ten minste is daar ons aalwyne wat begin blom om die andersins eentonig gekleurde veld bietjie kleur te gee. Party wonder nog of hulle nou sal te voorskyn kom, maar ander is vinnig om eerste hul prag te wys. Voor ons weet is die veld oortrek met hul oranje-pienk blomme.



"Dink julle ek lyk soos 'n aalwyn as ek tussen hulle regop staan?" (Foto: Elmarie Krige)

Vir Henrietta sien ons gereeld in 'n boom naby die ou nes-area sit. Miskien sit sy en wonder wanneer "haar" boom nou weer regop gaan staan! Gister (Saterdag) toe ons van die dorp afkom het een van hulle somer laag bokant die Estate gevlieg. Ons **moes** natuurlik eers stop om dit dop te hou – die wonderlike speel op die wind, hoe die vlerke gebruik word om die swiep, draai, uit te styg en soms op een plek te hang waar moontlike prooi dopgehou word. Ek sien ook nou en dan die paar oor ons Estate sweef, maar waar hul nuwe nesarea is, weet ek nie. Ek is net bly hulle is nog veilig en in ons area, al is dit nou nie op die Estate self nie! 'n Vriend wat aan die Black Eagle Support Group behoort (hulle is betrokke by die bewaring van die Witkruisarend in die Walter Sisulu Botaniese Tuine) het my vertel daar is 'n paar wat alreeds gesien is waar hul paar en ook dat hul nesgebou het in die Rietvlei

Natuur reserwaat! Natuurlik is kos volopper daar en hulle is ook veiliger en word nie so gesteur deur ontwikkeling, verkeer en te veel mense nie.

Soms hoor mens 'n voëlgeluid in die tuin maar sien nie die voël self nie en dan wonder mens wat se spesie dit is. Hoewel ons die Roberts Voëlgids DVD het is dit ampers 'n onbegonne taak om 'n voël net deur middel van hul geluid te probeer identifiseer. Die gewone riglyne vir identifikasie is meestal die vorm en grootte van die voël, of dit 'n grondvoël is al dan nie, vorm van die bek en so aan. Maar om deur middel van hul sang te probeer agterkom wat dit is is heelwat moeiliker – daar is letterlik duisende om deur te gaan!

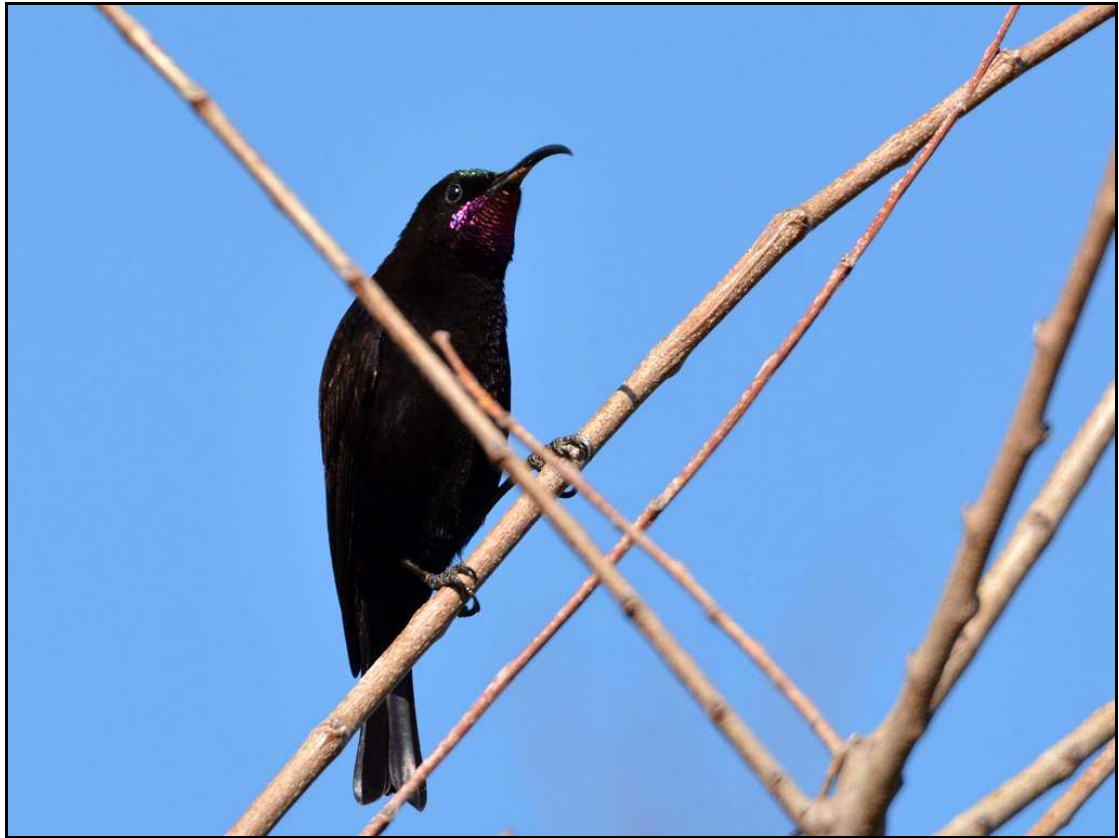
So paar weke gelede by sononder was ek buite en hoor skielik 'n heel nuwe en duidelike voël-geroep wat ek nie ken nie. In ons bome was maar die gewone laksmanne, duiwe, mossies, vinke en so aan, besig om te uit te kyk vir 'n laaste happie voor slapenstyd so ek het geweet dit moet 'n grondvoël wees. Garfield was heel aan die anderkant van ons plot besig met die veiligheidskamera, en toe hy terugkom vra hy dadelik of ek ook die voël gehoor het. So die roep was heel luid!

Nouja, hoe gemaak om die voël te probeer identifiseer? Ons het darem geweet om onder grondvoëls te kyk en wraggies, die geluksgodin was aan ons kant. Die eerste voël waarop hy klink het die bekende roep gehad! Dit is toe al die tyd die Swempie (*Peliperdix coqui*)! Wat 'n eienaardige, maar (vir my) eintlike oulike naam! Sover kon ons nog glad nie uitvind waar die eienaardige naam vandaan kom nie, behalwe dat die roep blykbaar klink na “swem-pie, swem-pie”; so ek neem aan dis hoe die naam posgevat het! Die swempie is die kleinste van die patrys familie.

Sover het ons die Kalaharipatrys (*Scleroptila levaillantoides*) en ook die Bospatrys (*Dendroperdix sephaena*) in ons area kon afneem, maar hierdie een? Aikona! Hulle is net te klein en so goed gekamoefleer; al het ons ons bes probeer kon ons sover nog nie een kon afneem nie. Ons hoor hul wel elke nou en dan in die gras net agter ons tuin en dis lekker om te weet ons kan hulle ook op die lys van voëls wat hier voorkom byvoeg.

Die Swempie eet meestal sade, lote en klein vruggies, maar soos ander patryse vorm insekte ook deel van hul dieet. Hoewel hul wel soms bolle en ondergrondse bolle sal eet, sal hul, anders as ander patrysies, dit nie met hul pote uitskrop nie, maar eerder met hul snawels uitpik. Die nessie is 'n vlak skropholte, uitgevoer met gras en baie goed versteek tussen graspolle.

Vanmiddag toe Garfield in die tuin was sien hy 'n ooievaar verbyvlieg – dis ongelukkig toe te ver om mooi af te neem, maar toe ons in ons Roberts gids kyk is dit mooi 'n Maraboe (*Leptoptilos crumeniferus*)! Volgens die Roberts Voëlgids is dit glo amper bedreig! Dis lekker om te weet iets wat skaars raak kom hier voor, mens hoop hulle gaan hier rond wil broei en vermeerder! Hy was ook gelukkig genoeg om 'n paar mooi foto's van 'n Swartsuikerbekkie mannetjie en wyfie te kry.



Swartsuikerbek mannetjie (bo) en wyfie (onder) (Foto's: Garfield Krige)





Swartbandlangstertjie (Eng. *Black-chested Prinia*) in sy nie-broei kleure. Hier ontbreek die swart band om die nek. Verwys na *Celtis africana* April 2014 vir broeikleure (Foto: Garfield Krige)

Laatmiddag het ons nogals pret hier by ons. Hier by 17h00 se kant, begin die bontkiewiete luid te roep by ons binneplaas – hulle weet al goed dis tyd vir aandete vir ons honde. Die tyd van die jaar begin kos skaars raak en dan geniet hulle ‘n stukkie brood. Die dikkoppe en ‘n spul ander voëls is ook daar in afwagting vir ‘n happie voor slapenstyd. Die grappigste vir ons is die dikkoppe, hul lyk so koddig as hulle hardloop met hul lang bene. Hul gryp graag die grootste stuk brood en hol dan vir ‘n vale eenkant toe om dit letterlik in te wurg en dan terug te kom vir meer. Snaaks genoeg is hulle groter as die kiewiete, maar heel versigtig en sal nie sommer die kiewiete se brood probeer afvat nie. ‘n Eienaardige, ek-is-baas-en-jy-is-klaas-tipe verhouding!

Van my kant is dit al vir die maand – keer maar die koue met ‘n lekker pot sop, ‘n bord vuurwarm kerrie, ‘n glas van die Kaap se beste rooi of ‘n stukkie lekker biltong!

References/Bronnelys: Roberts Bird Guide - Chittenden Hugh; Wikipedia

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

