

Celtis africana

Sterkfontein Country Estates

August/Augustus 2013

Plant of the month is the *Harveya pumila*. Very little is known about this lovely plant. The flowering season starts end of July to about end September. This is a parasitic plant, growing from the roots of another plant. The flowers appear directly out of the soil (no stems) and therefore are rarely noticed. It is often hidden below grass but when the veld was burned during the winter season, it is a bit easier to spot. This very rare plant was originally thought to have only yellow flowers, occurring on the Magaliesberg. However, in our area the plant makes a pink flower – very special indeed! This plant appears on the IUCN Red Data list, so we are very fortunate to have it growing on our Estate. Look out for this plant next time you take a walk in the veld or on your property. (Source: Field Guide to the Wild Flowers of the Highveld – Van Wyk. B, Malan. S)



Harveya pumila flowers in our Estate. The right-hand photo shows the flowers breaking through the hard, dry soil without any trouble

We are very excited to welcome a pair of Black-chested Snake Eagles (*Circaetus pectoralis*) for a second breeding season on the Estate! Those of you who have seen these magnificent birds circling the skies will agree that we are indeed lucky to have them in our area. We have had a few visits from members of a local birding club who were very excited about seeing them as far south as this. Some of us were lucky enough to witness them mating, so we are looking forward to a second healthy chick being hatched on our Estate.

The breeding season for the South African population is from June through to August. Only one egg is laid per clutch and the incubation period is 50 days. The chick will leave the nest after three months. Although they are not

endangered at this stage, urban sprawl is constantly reducing their hunting grounds and/or habitat.



Left: An adult Black-Chested Snake Eagle Right: Last Year's chick -now almost an adult. Note its more brownish colouring

As its name suggests it feeds mainly on snakes, but it will also prey on lizards, frogs, some small mammals and even insects! I am as scared of snakes as much as the next person, but think about the fact that it is a source of food - not only for these birds but also for our mongoose population – lets try and keep the balance in nature! If you have a snake near your house, rather try to catch it (or get a willing neighbour to do it for you!) and relocate it to the veld instead of just killing it. We found a large dead mole snake in the road the other day – totally unnecessarily killed, as they are not venomous! They keep the mole and rat population under control – nature working FOR us!

The female eagle is larger than the male and in flight the black horizontal stripes underneath the wings are clearly visible. Their nesting platforms are in treetops and sometimes Eskom pylons. The large yellow eye is a distinct feature of this bird. Please do not disturb them whilst breeding! (Sources: Roberts Bird Guide – Chittenden, H; Birdlife International)

On a lighter note: What do you get when you cross a chicken with a cement mixer? A bricklayer!

Although we have had a mild winter, we have been suddenly “blessed” with freezing winds for a couple of days. But, have faith - spring is around the corner! Lets green our Estate and plant lots of trees – indigenous where possible!

Quote: ‘The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second best time is now!’

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Die plant van die maand is die *Harveya pumila*. Hierdie pragtige plantjie word maklik misgekyk want die blomme groei direk uit die grond! Daar is nie veel inligting oor die plant beskikbaar nie, behalwe dat dit onder meer 'n parasitiese plant is wat groei op die wortels van 'n ander plant. Oorspronklik is gedink dat die blomme slegs in geelkleurige bloeivorm voorkom in die Magaliesberg. Onlangs is egter die pienkkleurige bloeivorm in Kalkeheuvel area asook op ons Estate ontdek.

Hierdie skaars plant kom voor in die IUCN Rooddata-lys so ons is bevoorreg dat dit hier groei! As veld in die winter gebrand word is dit makliker om die plantjie raak te sien in die vroeë, andersins kruip dit weg onder gras! Die bloeitydperk is July tot September so kyk gerus uit vir die pragtige blomme wanneer jy weer in die veld of op jou plot rondstap! (Bron: Field Guide to the Wild Flowers of the Highveld – Van Wyk. B, Malan. S)

Ons is baie opgewonde om die paar Swartborsslangarende (*Circaetus pectoralis*) vir 'n tweede agtereenvolgende broeiseisoen op die Estate te sien! Enigiemand wat al hierdie majestueuse voëls in die lug sien vlieg het sal saamstem ons is baie gelukkig om hulle weer terug in ons area te hê. Ons het reeds 'n paar maal besoek van opgewonde lede van 'n plaaslike Voëlklub gehad om na "ons" arende te kom kyk. Party van ons was ook gelukkig om die twee te sien paar so ons sien uit na die koms van die nuwe kuiken.

Die arende se broeiseisoen in Suid Afrika is vanaf Junie tot Augustus. Slegs een eier word gelê en dit neem 50 dae om uit te broei. Die kuiken sal die nes na 3 maande verlaat. Alhoewel dit nie as skaars op die stadium beskou word nie, is mens tog maar bekommert dat die mens met uitbreiding van woongebiede wel hul jagarea en/of habitat mettertyd mag in gevaar gaan stel.

Soos hul naam aandui is hul prooi hoofsaaklik slange. Hul dieet kan egter ook akkedisse, paddas, kleiner soogdiere en selfs insekte insluit. Mense, ons is almal bang vir slange (ek seker meer as die gewone ou!), maar laat ons tog probeer om nie alles voor die voet dood te maak nie. As 'n slang naby jou huis is, probeer maar die ding vang en êrens in die veld loslaat, of kry 'n gewillige buurman om te help. As ons alles voor die voet uitroei waar moet pragtige voëls soos die arende en ons meerkat populasie kos kry? Ons het die ander dag 'n groot molslang in die pad aangetref – dis nie 'n giftige slang nie, maar iemand het die arme ding eenvoudig, sonder om te dink, doodgemaak! Molslange hou die mol-populasie onder beheer en ander pestilensies soos muise en rotte word deur slange onder beheer gehou – Moeder Natuur wat VIR ons werk!

Die wyfie Swartborsslangarend is groter as die mannetjie. In vlug is die swart horisontale strepe op die ondervlerke duidelik sigbaar. Die groot geel oë van die voel is ook 'n kenmerk. Nesplatforms is gewoonlik in boomtoppe of soms op Eskom kragmaste. Moet hul tog asseblief nie versteur terwyl hulle broei nie! (Bronne: Roberts Voelgids – Chittenden, H ; Birdlife International)

Net vir die grap: Koos en Piet staan op 'n hoe berg: Koos met 'n perd, Piet met 'n budgie. Koos skiet die perd en spring af, Piet kyk na sy budgie en volg

hom. Albei val hulself desdinges. Koos: Piet, ek dink nie hierdie pêrre-shooting en budgiejumping is vir ons nie!

Die winter was nie te erg die jaar nie, tog het ons 'n paar koue winderige dae die afgelope tyd gehad. Maar die lente is om die draai, so laat ons ons area vergroen! Plant inheemse bome, dit lok inheemse voëls en insekte en skep balans in die natuur!

