

## *Celtis Africana*

Sterkfontein Country Estates

November 2015

**Good day Celtis friends,**

I think we can all agree that we are really experiencing weird weather! Over the weekend it was almost unbearably hot with scorching winds blowing at almost gale force strength and two days later we had to unpack the winter woollies again! With not much rain to speak of, this has done the veld no good at all. According to a recent weather report, at 48.4°C, Vredendal set the hottest global temperature for the month for October! This was just before the weekend and today (2 November) the weather bureau forecasted snow for the Drakensberg! But let's be positive and hope for some lovely summer showers soon!

Last month I placed a photo of the lovely *Boophone disticha* \* plant in the Celtis, and it is my choice for the plant of the month. This attractive, deciduous, bulbous plant has sweet-smelling pink flowers, and a thick covering of dry scales above ground. This plant is also known as poison bulb, tumbleweed or sore-eye flower and in Afrikaans as "kopseerblom" (translated meaning: flower that causes headaches!). The flower stalks lengthen quite a bit after flowering and forms a sphere. This sphere dries out and eventually breaks off, getting blown about by the wind and thus dispersing its seeds – therefore the name tumbleweed.

This sweetly scented plant derives its common name of sore-eye flower, from the fact that, if a person is exposed to the open flowers in a confined space, it may lead to sore eyes and/or a headache. The bulb itself is very poisonous and the Bushmen once used it as poison for their arrows. It contains a powerful hallucinogen and some traditional soothsayers use it to go into a trance, supposedly to enable them to communicate with their ancestors. However, an overdose can be fatal so no attempts should be made to use this in a "recreational way" if you don't know what you are doing.

This plant has many medicinal uses, so it forms part of our area's rich heritage of medicinal plants. Traditional healers use parts of the plant to treat pain and wounds. Some African tribes, as well as some Europeans, use parts of the plant to cure various ailments. The outer covering of the plant is applied to abscesses and boils and fresh leaves are used to stop the bleeding of wounds.

In the Eastern Cape, the scales of this bulb are commonly used in the Xhosa initiation ceremonies to use as dressing for circumcision wounds. There is a thought that many of the frequently reported complications after circumcision could be partly due to a shortage of this natural remedy. It is one of the heavily traded plants at muti markets.



Poison Bulb (*Boophone disticha*) (Photo: Elmarie Krige)

An interesting fact is that material from this species was used to preserve the Khoi Kouga mummy found in the Langkloof! This is the only mummy ever found in Southern Africa from a cave in the Baviaanskloof Wilderness Area. Dr Johan Binneman of Rhodes University made this discovery in 1998. This remarkably well-preserved mummy is about 2000 years old. The buried human remains were found wrapped in *Boophone disticha* bulb scales, preserving it and protecting it from flesh-eating organisms. It was subsequently transferred to the Albany museum in Grahamstown. However, due to the sensitivity of human remains and to consider the local population it is not being displayed.

\* The spelling of the scientific name has changed; in my older guides and on some websites it is still spelled "Boophane" but newer guides spell it "Boophone" (Acknowledgement: Grobler. A)

Eagle news: Skye, our latest chick has become a beautiful juvenile and Leon (SCE152) says it is now flying short distances every day, returning to the nest later in the day. What a beautiful bird and I wish life was not so busy for me this time of the year so I could go and visit. Leon sent me this photo of Skye. How lucky he is to be able to watch it grow right on his doorstep!



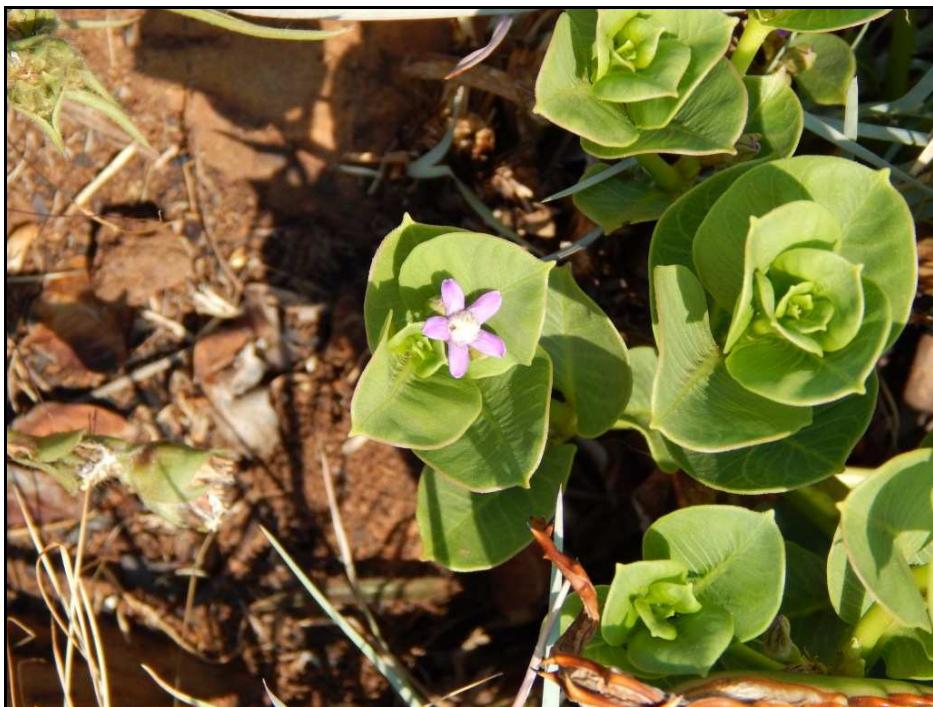
**Skye, looking fierce with wind blowing its head feathers from behind** (Photo Leon Bylsma SCE152)

The only snake I have seen so far this summer was a baby egg-eater snake (*Dasypeltis scabra*) I spotted along the side of the road on Malmani Road! Where have all the snakes gone? I wonder if Kgosi and Henrietta are responsible for this! Have a look at the photo in Afrikaans section.

Despite the lack of rain, many of our wild flowers still bravely stick out their pretty heads to give us pleasure when walking on our property.



***Vernonia oligocephala* (Bitterbossie)** (Photo: Elmarie Krige)



**Raphionacme hirsuta** (the stalks are used with sugar to make a potent alcoholic drink by the Sothos) (Photo: Elmarie Krige)

Have a look at these beautiful photos Garfield managed to get of the Green Wood-hoopoe (*Phoeniculus purpereus*), as well as of the Southern African Grey Hornbill (*Tockus nasutus*)! Then there are my cute little fiscals in the nest – photos in Afrikaans section!



**Green Wood-hoopoe (*Phoeniculus purpereus*)** Due to overcast conditions, the vibrant colours of this bird appear brighter than usual (Photo: Garfield Krige)



An African Grey Hornbill throwing its head back, calling out, "pie pie pie...piepiepie" (*Tockus nasutus*) (Photo: Garfield Krige)

Recently we became aware of a new frog sound. We identified it by way of its call as the Tremelo Sand Frog (*Tomopterna cryptotis*), and so far we could only enjoy its sound near the house, but we have not been able to get a photo of this cute little frog – it only gets to a maximum size of 51mm! (Source: The Complete Guide to the Frogs of Southern Africa, Du Preez, L. and Carruthers, V).

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**Just for fun:**

What is green and dangerous?  
A frog with a hand grenade!

Why did the frog cross the road?  
To see why the chicken did it!

**Worth mulling over:**

"Conservation is a state of harmony between men and land"

"Harmony with land is like harmony with a friend; you cannot cherish his right hand and chop off his left." Both quotes by Aldo Leopold (January 11, 1887 – April 21, 1948 - American author, scientist, ecologist, forester, conservationist, and environmentalist)

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I hope you enjoyed reading about our interesting plant of the month and, till next month, with a smile and high hopes for lots of rain I salute you all!

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### **Goeiedag aan al die *Celtis* vriende!**

Van C. Louis Leipoldt se passievolle woorde dat Oktober die “mooiste, mooiste maand” is, was min te siene. Oktober het wel goed begin maar met versengende hitte en stormsterkte wind wat alles verder verskroei, lyk ons veld nou, begin November, nie te goed nie. Ons kan regtig doen met goeie reëns. Mens voel jammer vir boere wat afhanklik is vir goeie en tydige reën vir hul voortbestaan. Volgens ‘n onlangse weerberig het Vredendal die hoogste temperatuur ooit ter wêreld vir Oktober aangeteken - 'n hittige 48.4°C! Dit was voor die naweek en vandag (2 Nov) het die weerburo sneeu op die Drakensberg voorspel! Ons hoop maar ons kry binnekort lekker dae-lange reënbuie.

In verlede maand se *Celtis* was daar foto's geplaas van die pragtige *Boophane disticha*\* en dis my plant van die maand vir hierdie uitgawe. Hierdie mooi bladwisselende bolplant het 'n dik bedekking van droë "skubbe" bogronds. Die plant het mooi, pienk welriekende blommetjies en die volksname daarvoor is onder meer seeroogblom of kopseerblom of ook tolbossie. Die blomstelle verleng na die bloeiperiode en vorm 'n ronde "bal" wat uitdroog, naderhand afbreek en deur die wind rondgewaai word. Met die wat die tolbossie so rondgewaai word, word die saad ook so versprei.

Die volksnaam seeroogblom of kopseerblom het ontstaan omdat, as mens in 'n eng spasie blootgestel word aan die blom dit tot seer oë en/of hoofpyn kan ly. Die bol self is baie giftig en die San het dit in die verlede aan hul pylpunte gebruik. Die gebruik kan ook tot erge hallucinasies ly, maar moet tog nou nie dit probeer en sien of dit werk nie, dis uiters giftig as mens nie weet wat jy doen nie! Sekere tradisionele waarsêers gebruik dit dan ook om in 'n beswyming te gaan om glo met hul voorvaders te kommunikeer.



Saad-sfeer van die tolbos/kopseerblom (*Boophone disticha*) (Foto: Elmarie Krige)

Hierdie plant het ook heelwat medisinale gebruik en dit vorm dus deel van ons ryke erfenisskat van medisinale plante. Tradisionele genesers gebruik gedeeltes van die plant vir die behandeling van pyn en wonde. Sekere Afrika stamme sowel as sommige Europeërs gebruik dele van die plant om verskeie siektetoestande gesond te maak. Die buitenste dele van die plant word gebruik vir absesse en pitswere en vars blare word gebruik om bloeding te stop.

In die Oos-Kaap word die "skubbe" van die bol algemeen gebruik in die rituele van Khosa seuns se besnyding. Die skubbe word gebruik as verbande om wonde wat deur besnyding veroorsaak word, te genees. Daar word vermoed dat die gereelde komplikasies wat met die besnydings-rituele gepaardgaan, gebeur as gevolg van 'n tekort aan hierdie natuurlike geneesmiddel. Dit is een van die plante waarmee daar op groot skaal op muti markte handel gedryf word.

Iets baie interessants is dat gedeeltes van die plant gebruik was om die Khoi Kouga mummie wat in die Langkloof ontdek is te bewaar! Dr Johan Binneman van die Rhodes Universiteit het hierdie ontdekking in 1998 gemaak. Sover is dit die enigste mummie van die aard wat in Suidelike Afrika in 'n grot in die Baviaanskloof Wildernis area gevind is. Hierdie ongelooflik goedbewaarde mummie is na raming ongeveer 2000 jaar oud. Die menslike oorskot is gevind, toegedraai in die *Boophone disticha* se "skubbe" wat dit bewaar en beskerm het teen vleisetende organismes. Dis uiteindelik na die Albany museum te Grahamstad geneem. Menslike oorskot is altyd 'n sensitiewe saak en dit word dus, om nie aanstoot aan die plaaslike bevolking te gee nie, nie uitgestal nie.

\*Die spelling van die wetenskaplike naam het verander; in ouer gedse en op sekere webwerwe word dit nog as "Boophane" gespel, maar intussen is die spelling verander na "Boophone".(Erkenning: Grobler.A)

Wat ons arendkuiken, Skye, betref – hoe pragtig het hy/sy nie geword nie. Leon (SCE 152) het vir my foto's gestuur. Hy sê Skye vlieg nou al elke dag entjies en keer saans weer terug na die nes. Ai hoe wens ek nie die lewe was minder gejaag dat ek kan gaan kuier en Skye dophou nie! Leon is darem sowaar bevoorreg dat die arende so naby kom nesmaak het en hy hulle doen en late gemaklik kan dophou.



"Wat kyk jy?" Skye, ons jongste Swartborsslangarend-kuiken (Foto: Leon Bylsma SCE152)

Sover is die enigste slang wat ek nog die somer gesien het, 'n baba eiervretertjie (*Dasypeltis scabra*) langs Malmaniweg. Waar sou almal die somer wegkruip – of sou Kgosi of Henrietta dalk skuldig wees aan die "tekort"?



'n Baba eiervretertjie (*Dasypeltis scabra*) (Selfoonfoto: Elmarie Krige)

Ten spyte van min reën is daar steeds talle veldblommetjies wat uit die grond kruip. Mens kan nie glo dat party wat so fyn lyk sulke droogte kan weerstaan en skynbaar floreer nie. Tog moet ek erken dis beslis nie soos ander somers wanneer die veld soms oortrek is van blommetjies van alle soorte nie.



**Wildepataat (Ipomoea obscura)** (Foto: Elmarie Krige)



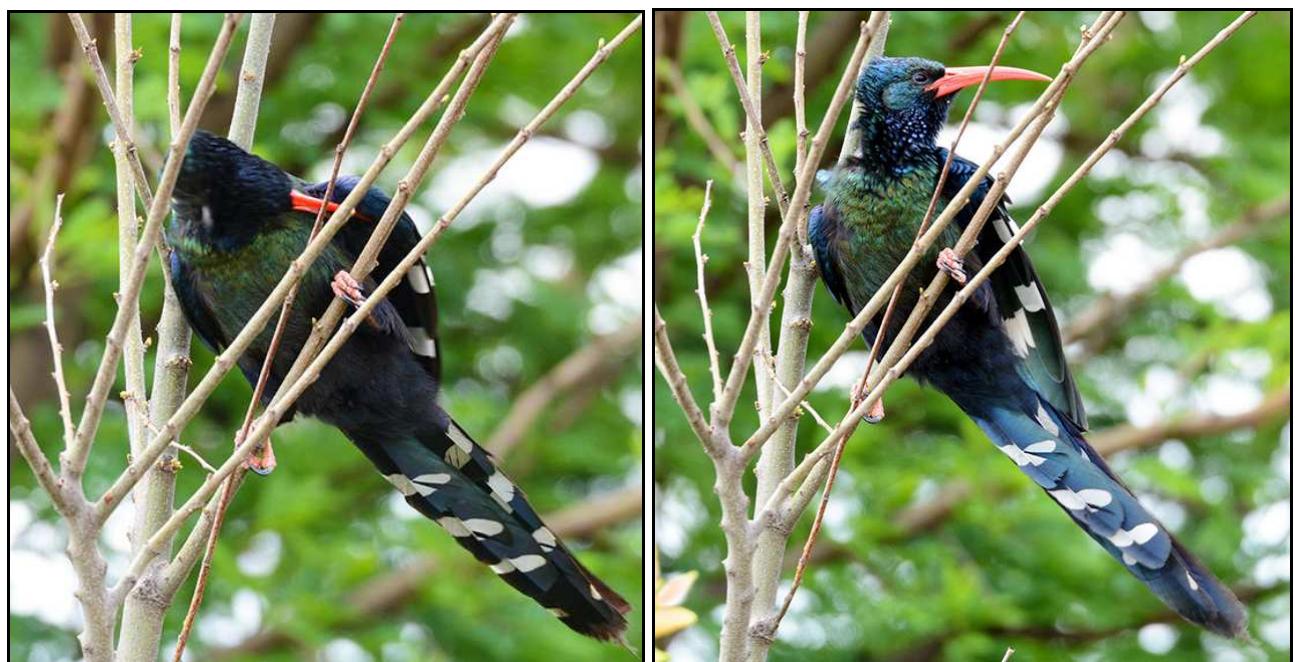
**Raphionacme hirsuta** (die Sothos maak 'n sterk alkoholiese drank van die stammetjies en suiker)  
(Foto: Elmarie Krige)

Daar is natuurlik altyd die voëls waaraan mens jou kan verkyk – kyk na die pragtige foto's wat Garfield van die Rooibekkakelaar (*Phoeniculus purpereus*) en die

Grysneushoringvoël (*Tockus nasutus*) geneem het. En die laksmankuikentjies is my bydrae – hul bly maar oulik vir my!



Grysneushoringvoël (*Tockus nasutus*) (Foto: Garfield Krige)



Op hierdie twee fotos van die Rooibekkakelaar (*Phoeniculus purpureus*) kan die wit dwarsstrepe onder die vlerke en stert duidelik gesien word (Foto's: Garfield Krige)



"Ons is nie gelukkig nie, want ...



waar's ons kos?!" Laksmankuikens (Foto's: Elmarie Krige)

Onlangs het ons 'n nuwe paddaklanke naby die huis begin hoor en nadat Garfield geduldig deur die paddaklanke op ons CD gewerk het, het ons uitgevind dis 'n Trillersandpaddatjie (*Tomopterna cryptotis*). Hoewel ons weet waar hy wegkruip, was ons nog nie gelukkig genoeg om 'n foto te kon neem nie. Die paddatjie word maar sowat 51 mm groot! (Bron: The Complete Guide to the Frogs of Southern Africa - Du Preez, L. and Carruthers, V).

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#### Net vir die grap:

Meraai doen aansoek vir 'n nuwe werk. Personeelbeampte: "Meraai, het jy tik geneem op skool?" Meraai: "Nei meneer, daai dae was daar net bokswyn en dagga."

Op daardie noot groet ek en hoop julle het dit geniet om te lees oor ons interessante plant van die maand. Groete van my kant tot volgende maand.

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

Bonne en erkennings/References and acknowledgements: Field Guide to the Wild Flowers of the Highveld, Van Wyk. B and Malan. S; Plantzafrica.com; The Botanical Society website; Wikipedia; Grobler.A

