

Celtis africana

Sterkfontein Country Estates February/Februarie 2016

Good day friends of the Celtis,

February – the shortest month (and this year it is leap year too) and also the month when that old devil, Valentine, comes around! I can already see how some of you roll your eyes – its all just a bit of fun and if you don't want to join in it, well that is your choice of course!



Figure 1: *Chamaecrista comosa* (Photo: Elmarie Krige)



Figure 2: *Anthericum* spp. (Photo: Elmarie Krige)

We had lovely rains, and, generous as Mother Nature is, she gives back in bucketsful. The veld is full of flowers now, like the *Anthericum*s swaying their lovely flowered heads in the slightest wind. The *Babianas* and the *Hypoxis* got the “spring feeling” and decided to push out some flowers before the end of the season, and the *Ipomoeas* are still in flower too. Many other plants are in flower right now; one only has to take a walk in the veld and look!

But the most exciting for me, is when I see the first of our lovely, indigenous hibiscus (*Hibiscus microcarpus*) plants in flower! They are not plentiful and are low growing – the flowers almost sprouting directly from the soil, so it’s very exciting to suddenly stumble upon one of them amongst our grasses. One can certainly observe the resemblance to the garden variety, looking at the flowers. However, these are not shrubs like the garden variety, but a low growing plant.



Figure 3: *Hibiscus microcarpus*, one of our indigenous hibiscus species (Photo: Elmarie Krige)



Figure 4: *Crabbea angustifolia* (Photo: Elmarie Krige)

One of our indigenous orchids (the *Habenaria caffra* – have a look on the website under Flora – Our Orchids) started budding, which should open soon.

Of course the rains brings swarms of insects which brought the little Amur falcons for a visit, whilst the little swifts are having a feast every morning, fattening up before their long trek to Europe at the end of the summer.

Recently I got an email from Jenny Johnson (SCE 126) about recycling. I know there are more of you who are interested in this and I would hope this could maybe push those who are not yet doing it, to at least think about it. At home we try to do our bit, but I know we could perhaps also do more! We recycle all paper wherever we can; plastic bags of course, are re-used until it is too full of holes to be worth using and I don't just buy plastic containers anymore. Ice cream tubs works just as well as commercially sold products. So the more ice cream I eat, the more I save the planet! Just kidding folks, but any excuse for some ice cream, right?! Of course all eggshells, veggie and fruit peels, used teabags and stuff like that, goes straight to our compost heap.

To get back to Jenny and recycling, she kindly let me know (to share with all) that there is a glass recycling bin at the Shell garage (on the corner of Robert Broom drive) near the Rant en Dal Spar and Mica – so, very convenient and really not out of the way. You can't miss it, it is a large blue dome-like container. If I remember correctly there are some containers inside Key West at Pick'nPay, and then, at President Hypermarket, they have big containers for things like batteries, glass, paper, plastic etc so it really is convenient to do your bit to be environmentally conscious!

Below is a list of everyday things and how long it takes to decompose. Maybe we should all think a bit more about recycling – so many things can be recycled; money, and more importantly, the earth, can be saved if things are re-cycled for re-using.

Plastic bottles: 70-450 years
Plastic bag: 500-1000 years
Tin can: around 50 years
Leather shoes: 25-40 years
Thread: 3-4 months
Cotton: 1-5 months
Rope: 3-14 months

Cigarette butts: 1-12 years
Milk- and other drink tetra packets: 5 years
Nylon clothes: 30-40 years
Baby diapers: 500-800 years
Fishing line: 600 years.
Aluminium can: 200 years
Glass bottles and Styrofoam: a MILLION years - that is almost forever!

These are scary figures! Of course it depends on certain factors such as climate, sun etc, so in some cases or, in some places then, things might take longer/shorter to decompose, but all in all, I think we all should do a bit more re-use/recycling to help our planet.

I recently chatted to Johan Marais, well-know author of quite a few books and guides on the snakes of Southern Africa and, as far as I am concerned, a fundi on the subject

of snakes. I mentioned that we have not encountered as many snakes as previous years and what does he think the reason could be.

According to him, it is a case of when there is a drought such as we are experiencing at the moment, snakes can hide out for weeks, or even months underground without coming out at all. Dehydration can quickly cause the death of a snake and they'd rather hide out underground where it is cool, until rains have fallen, and only then do they come out to look for prey. So, the poor snakes also suffer in the drought!

* Since the recent rains we have encountered a puffie in our drive-way, two red-lipped snakes (one inside the garage and one inside the scullery!) and a huge rinkhals was cornered by the dogs at the Hoogendyks – it was so big we could easily see it from our plot! Luckily (for both the snake and dogs) it managed to escape and no harm was done to either snake or dogs. Do visit the website and look under Fauna – Sterkfontein Snakes for some interesting facts and photos.

Now for something **very** special and interesting! Garfield noticed a small white spider on a lavender bush catching a butterfly during one of his lunch breaks.



Figure 5: "Gotcha!" (Photo Garfield Krige)

A few days later he once again noticed that the same spider now caught a bee. What happened then tells its own little story of how nature works. It is actually a story within a story. Within another story, inside another story – or something like that!

All photos with the story at the end of the English section;

Isn't nature interesting! And how lucky (and patient!) Garfield was to get all the action on film!

Friends, that's all from me for this month. I trust you enjoyed the Celtis and till next month, have a wonderful February!

Here's the spider story...



1) A white female spider sucking at one end of the bee she had just caught, while the small flies are sucking at the other end. Also note the legs of the much smaller male spider sticking out from behind her abdomen, holding her in a lover's embrace.



2) From this angle, one can see the yellow-brownish male better, holding on for dear life under her abdomen. He must "do his thing" in such a way that it does not irritate her, as she might have him as a second course! In this case his timing was just right! Every now and then she swiped with one of her front legs at the flies that were irritating her. Note how the flies are swelling up from gorging themselves.



3) Lo-and-behold, a second male appears on a lavender bud nearby...



4) Male no 2 then climbs up to the top of the bud, lifts his rear up into the breeze, and just like a true "Spiderman", shoots his silky thread across to the female's perch. Unfortunately, the silk thread is invisible on this photo.



5) Here is male no 2 getting closer to where the action is...



6) ...and upon reaching her, sees that, oh dammit - she's already "otherwise occupied" !



7) Just to make sure, he still gets on to her abdomen, but male no 1's legs (in a lover's embrace) are clearly visible. Male no 1 is also somewhat larger than him!



8) Hugely disappointed, male no 2 leaves - he is just visible on a lavender leaf, to the left of the picture (out of focus).



9) Shortly thereafter, and tired after all the action, male no 1 takes a wee rest on top of her "beautiful" abdomen.



10) Keeping in mind that he could very well be the second course; male no 1 then decides to slip away unnoticed. He's happy, she's happy, the flies are happy, but poor male no 2 in the background, hmm, not so happy!

Goeie dag Celtis vriende!

Februarie: die kortste maand in die jaar (en natuurlik is daar 29 dae die jaar wat dit 'n skrikkeljaar maak) en ook die maand wat daai ou stouterd, Valentyn, kom kuier. Ek sien al hoe party van julle jul oë rol, maar ag wat, dis alles pret en elkeen se keuse of hy (of sy!) iets wil doen (of nie!) op die 14e.

Na elke reënbus wat ons kry gee Moeder Natuur emmersvol van haar geskenke. Dis wonderlik hoeveel plante in die veld blom na net 'n paar druppels. Oral in die veld is daar die *Anthericum*s wat op hul slanke stele in die wind swaai. Die *Babianas* en *Hypoxis* kry toe sommer die lentegevoel en stoot gou 'n paar blomme uit voor die

somer se einde en natuurlik is daar steeds *Ipomoeas* te siene. Talle ander blommetjies is nou te sien – mens moet regtig net rondstap en kyk!



Figure 6: Wilde ertjie/Wild pea (Foto: Elmarie Krige)



Figure 7: *Tephrosia longipes* (Foto: Elmarie Krige)

Maar wat my die meeste opgewonde maak, is as ek die eerste blom van ons eie inheemse hibiskus (*Hibiscus microcarpus*) tussen die gras in die veld opmerk! Ongelukkig is hul bloeitydperk kort en mens is regtig gelukkig as jy op een afkom aangesien hulle baie laag groeiend is en lekker versteek is tussen ons grasse. Kyk na die blom en jy sal dadelik ooreenkomste tussen ons inheemse blom en die tuin variëteit raaksien. Die tuin hibiskus is egter 'n struikie terwyl ons inheemse plant baie laag groei – dit lyk kompleteer of die blom uit die grond self kom.

Een van ons inheemse orgideë is ook besig om blomknoppe te vorm (die *Habenaria caffra* – kyk gerus op die webwerf onder Flora – Our Orchids) en die blomme sal eersdaags oop wees.

Natuurlik het die reën heelwat insekte laat uitbroei wat gemaak het dat die mooie Oostelike rooipoot valkies kom kuier het. Die swaeltjies geniet ook die insekfeesmaal soggens; hulle is hard besig om hulself vet te maak vir die lang reis na Europa wat aan die einde van die somer begin.

Ek het onlangs e-pos van Jenny Johnson (SCE 126) ontvang met betrekking tot herwinning. Ek weet daar is meer van ons wat sterk voel hieroor en ek hoop, nadat julle bietjie verder gelees het, dat die van julle wat nog traag was, tog bietjie sal nadink en miskien besluit dis tog die regte ding om te doen. Tuis probeer ons darem ons deeltjie bydra – papier word sover moontlik hergebruik en so ook inkopiesakkies; groente en vrugte skille, gebruikte teesakkies en eierdoppe gaan reguit komposhoop toe. Ek koop sover moontlik nie meer plastiekhouders nie – roomysbakke werk net so goed soos die wat in winkels te kope is. My redenasie is: hoe meer ek roomys eet hoe meer bewaar ek die planeet! Grappies op 'n stokkie, maar enige verskoning om roomys te eet, reg?!

Terug by Jenny; sy het laat weet (en ek deel dit graag) dat daar 'n groot glasherwinningshouer is reg by die Shell garage (hoek van Robert Broom rylaan) wat langs die Rant en Dal Spar en Mica geleë – so, dis baie gerieflik! Mens kan dit nie mis aangesien dit 'n groot ligblou koepelvormige houer is. As ek reg onthou is daar houders by Pick'nPay in Key West en by President Hypermarket is daar 'n paar groot houders vir onder meer batterye, papier, plastiek glas ens., so komaan ouens, geen rede om nie deel te wees van herwinningsprojekte nie!

As mens nou na onderstaande data kyk dan skrik mens eintlik as mens sien hoe lank party alledaagse gebruiksartikels neem om te vergaan. Baie geld kan gespaar word deur dinge te herwin, maar belangrikste van alles ons planeet, waarvan ons maar een het, word bewaar!

Plastiek bottels: 70 – 450 jaar
Plastiek sakke: 500-1000 jaar
Tin houders: ongeveer 50 jaar
Leer skoene: 25-40 jaar
Garing: 3-4 maande
Katoen: 1-5 maande
Tou: 3-14 maande

Sigaretstompies: 1-12 jaar
Melk- en ander tetra houders: 5 jaar
Nylon kledingstukke: 30-40 jaar
Weggooi babadoeke: 500-800 jaar
Vislyn: 600 jaar
Aluminium blikkies: 200 jaar
Glas bottels en polistireen houders: 'n ongelooflike miljoen jaar – mensig dis soos in vir altyd!

Daar is natuurlik bydraende faktore wat vinniger of ook stadiger dekomposisie kan meehelp, soos byvoorbeeld die klimaatstoestand - meer son ens, maar die syfers is nogals skrikwekkend en ek dink elkeen kan probeer om dinge te hergebruik/hersirkuleer en ons arme planeet bietjie help!

Onlangs gesels ek met Johan Marais, slangkenner en die skrywer van 'n hele paar boeke en gidse oor slange in Suider Afrika, en wat my betref 'n fundi oor slange. Ek vra hom toe of daar 'n rede kan wees waarom ons so min slange die somer raakgeloop het. Volgens hom is dit ook weens die erge droogte wat ons tans beleef.

Slange kan vir weke - selfs maande, ondergronds skuil totdat genoegsame reën geval het, waarna hul sal uitkom om te jag. Aangesien ontwatering tot 'n slang se dood sal ly is hul baie minder aktief in hitte toestande soos ons nou beleef. Dus is dit vir selfbeskerming wat hul in die koeler ondergrondse tunnels bly skuil. So, selfs die slange sukkel in droogtetye!

* Sedert die onlangse reën het ons 'n poffie in ons oprit gekry; twee rooilipslangetjies het kom kuier (een in ons garage en een in ons opwaskamer!) en 'n meneer van 'n rindhals was op 'n stadium deur die Hoogendyks se honde vasgekeer. Die rindhals was so groot ons kon dit sien van ons plot af! Gelukkig (vir beide die slang en die honde!) kon die slang ongedeerd wegkom, ook sonder enige skade aan die honde. Kyk gerus op die webwerf onder Fauna – Sterkfontein Snakes vir interessante feite en foto's oor ons slange.

Nou vir iets **baie** interessants en uitsonderlik! Garfield het een middag gedurende sy middagete-uur foto's geneem wat mens weereens vertel hoe wonderlik die natuur is. Die foto's vertel 'n storie van 'n ander storie binne 'n ander storie in nog 'n ander storie – of so-iets! Lees gerus die storietye onder die foto's – ek weet julle verstaan almal Engels, en weens 'n gebrek aan spasie, is die onderskrifte ongelukkig net in Engels.

Hy was besonder gelukkig om alles op film vas te lê – en natuurlik moes hy baie geduldig ook wees!

Wel, vriende, dis al vir hierdie maand, geniet Februarie en tot ons weer gesels, bly veilig!

