

Celtis Africana

Sterkfontein Country Estates
October/Oktoper 2013

This month I am not going to focus on a specific plant or tree, but rather place a few photos of the wild flowers in bloom right now on the Estate. I am so amazed at the variety and even though we have had no rain, they seem to pop their heads up all over the veld and its just so lovely to see. Some of the flowers are so tiny one has to really look, but I am truly amazed every time I take a walk in the veld!

I am often surprised at people, after having just been to a game reserve, announcing they "did not really see much game" - just because they did not see the Big Five! So, when next walking around on your plot, don't look for the spectacular, but rather the interesting - the almost hidden - flowers, plants and grasses and you'd be surprised at the variety that exist in only a couple of metres! It's impossible for me to feature all of the flowers, so I am just going to place just a few photos with their names so you can see what to look out for. If there are common names, it will be in brackets. With time I will feature more – again it's a problem of space and too big a file to forward to all! So enjoy!





Baeckea obovata



Vernonia galpinii (*Perskwashbossie*)



Polygala uncinata (wild violet/wilde viooltjie)



Hypoxis hamerocallidea (African potato/gifbol)



Lactuca inermis



Cyanotis speciosa (dolls powder puff/blou poeierkwassie)



Gnidia kraussiana (harge gifbossie)

We have been lucky to have a breeding pair of Southern fiscals (*Lanius collaris*) on our plot for the past 5-6 years. Every year they seem to want to nest a little closer to our house – probably because of the availability of drinking water and the odd tasty morsels from the kitchen! We have watched with amusement how the fledglings, now almost twice the size of the parents, are being taken around their specific territory around our house all day long.

Judging by its size, one would think it is quite capable of getting its own food, but not these little buggers! All day long it follows the parent from tree to tree, flapping their wings in a hysterical fashion, whilst all the time begging in their high-pitched voices for more, more and more! I think the poor over-worked parents loose quite a bit of weight until they eventually hunt for themselves! Late afternoon when I feed the birds some bread, the parent swoops down for a piece and take it to the ever-hungry chick! Interestingly the other birds keep a respectful distance from this enemy! Then, just before bedtime the parent will take it to one of the birdbaths. While it is waiting on a nearby branch, the parent will first chase away any other birds trying to get a drink and as soon as that's done, the little one will fly down to come and have a drink alongside the parent!

The Southern fiscal, with the Northern fiscal, was previously lumped together as the common fiscal- the name by which most of us know it. The Southern fiscal is the one found in our area. The fiscal is a highly territorial, solitary nester and the males defend their territory ferociously against other males, often grabbing intruders with their claws and pecking them repeatedly. They are a monogamous species.



Adult Southern Fiscal/Janfiskaal/Laksman

The female handles most of the thickly walled deep, cup-like construction of the nest. The nest is made from twigs, flower heads, bark, grass, leafy herbs and moss and, sometimes even paper, pieces of rags, spider web, feathers and cocoons are used. It takes her 2-5 days to construct the nest, built in the mid to lower branches of a thorny bush or small thorny tree. A new nest is built every new breeding season. Typically 2-3 broods are produced within a breeding season, each consisting of 1-5, but usually 3-4 egg clutch. Mainly the female incubates the pale, speckled eggs for a period of between 12 and 16 days. The chicks are mainly fed by the female for the first two weeks, after which the male gets more involved in the parenting. The chicks stay in the nest 14-21days and can feed for themselves 3 weeks later. However, they only become independent a few more weeks later and only leave their parents' territory when 4 months old! The young is of a more feint black-brownish colour, with blackish horizontal stripes above and below.

The success of this species' survival is because of its varied diet and clever hunting techniques. It often hunts in a sit-and-wait technique from a prominent perch, remaining almost motionless, scanning the area for prey with its sharp eyes. When prey is spot, it will glide down to catch it and, if small enough, it will be eaten on the spot. Larger prey will be eaten on its perch or impaled on a thorn or barbed fence, using it as a larder. It will often store lots of prey this way in a specific area.

So next time you notice a row of insects hanging on your fence – it is not a “battle sign” and you don't need to call Conserve Security, its just the fiscal's larder! Its diet includes mainly insects, small mammals and rodents, birds, chameleons, small snakes, grasshoppers, moths – the list is long, and sometimes seeds and also scraps from households. Sometimes up to three quarters of its day is spend just waiting for prey – I could never do that!

Imagine having to wait that long for food – I'd be off to the nearest Woolies food store in a jiffy!



Nest with four eggs and one hatchling/Nes met eiers en pasgebore kuiken



Fledgling/Jong voël

The story behind its common name – fiscal, is apparently as follows: It was named in ‘honour’ of the “fiskaal”, a taxman associated with the Dutch East India Company. The “fiskaal”, who wore black and white whilst doing his job, collected year-end (fiscal) taxes, viciously preying on people’s money, leaving them “hanging out to dry” – just like our fiscal does with its prey! This

interesting little story comes from The Guardian of January 2011. The fiscal is also known as Jacky Hangman, fiscal shrike or butcherbird. The fiscal is a fairly common bird, but as it is one of our beautiful African birds, and as we enjoy watching its antics, I decided to feature it this month. Look out for it in your garden!

Sources: Birdlife SA, Roberts Voëlgids

Saturday 5 October was clean-up day for some of the committed ladies from our Estate. Thanks to the ladies and kids for their hard work to clean up alongside our road! The Steel Magnolia team with Ilani, Elise and Carolien and kids started from the western side and the Tough-as-Nails team of Val and Elmarie plus kids started from the beginning of Malmani road! It was great to see the enthusiasm with which the kids joined in – some as young as 4 years – and she did her bit, walking kilometre after kilometre with everyone else, picking up rubbish! Two ladies had to cancel last minute due to unforeseen circumstances, nevertheless Delene sent her kids along and they did their bit in helping!

People drove past while we were busy, some not even greeting us, but most were appreciative of what we were doing and stopped for a word or two or gave the thumbs-up. We all have better things to do on a Saturday, but it was great that some people were committed to make a difference. Can't we all try to be a little bit more thoughtful – next time you drive on the road and notice an empty bottle or paper bag, have a quick stop and pick it up or let your kids jump out and do it. It really takes only a minute or two, after all we all live here and can all do our bit.

Somebody must be on a strict diet of McDonalds and beer with the odd Coke thrown in for good measure! Seriously though, the amount of rubbish collected was quite unbelievable – a trailer load full taken by Garfield to the municipal waste site. I don't know how one can stop the bad habit of people littering, because today on our way to town I noticed "new" litter! Unbelievable!

Operation Clean up did not even take that long and if we had more ladies joining us, it would have gone even quicker! Afterwards everyone went to Elmarie's place for some well-deserved cold drinks and snacks and after having sugared-up the kids, we had a bit of a "kuier" and all went home with goodie-bags. Well done and thank you to all the ladies who gave up time and energy to help clean up our Estate!

Dankie aan die vrouens wat hul staal gewys het met die skoonmaak langs ons pad – dit wil gedoen wees! Dit was moeite ja, en ja, almal het beter dinge te doen op 'n Saterdag, maar dit was lekker om deel te wees van 'n span wat wys hul gee om. Die Steel Magnolias span van Ilani, Elise, Carolien en kinders het aan die einde van Malmani weg begin en die Tough-as-Nails span van Val, Elmarie n kinders het by die beginpunt van Malmanieweg begin. Die kinders het kliphard meegedoen- enetjie so jonk as 4 jaar en sy het al die pad

saam gestap en net so hard gewerk! Na die tyd het almal iets koels te drinke en iets te ete by Elmarie se plek gekry. Baie dankie aan ons dames van staal en elke liewe kind wat so hard gewerk het!

Dit was op die ou einde 'n hele waentjie vol gemors wat Garfield weggerig het – ongelooflik! En vandag was daar alweer goed langs die pad – hoe kry mens iemand uit die mors-kultuur – het iemand raad? Miskien kan elkeen sy of haar deel doen deur net soms, as julle 'n leë bottel of papier langs die pad sien lê net gou te stop en dit op te tel? Dis moeite ja, maar ons bly tog almal hier en mens doen dit nie vir my of jou buurman of wie ook al, maar eintlik vir onsself – ons almal wil tog in 'n mooi en skoon omgewing bly.





Next month will once again feature some of the fun photo's sent by some of you guys. This is already loaded with info and photos and I don't want to get into trouble by sending big files!

On the lighter side: Two blondes fall into a deep tunnel. The one says ‘It’s very dark in here’ to which the other replies ‘I don’t know, I can’t see’.

What do smart blondes and UFO’s have in common? You always hear about them but you never see them!

Redhead to her blonde friend: ‘Last night I slept with a Brazilian.’ Blonde: ‘Oh my gosh – how could you... how many is a Brazilian?!’

Hierdie maand gaan ek nie fokus op ‘n spesifieke plant of boom nie, maar ek gaan eerder ‘n paar foto’s plaas van pragtige blommetjies wat nou oral in die veld oopstaan. Dis vir my so ongelooflik dat, ten spyte van geen reën, die mooiste blommetjies jaar na jaar gesig kom wys. Dis nie altyd die grootse of die uitstaande wat ons moet betover nie maar alle blommetjies, plante en grasse wat elkeen ‘n unieke plek vul in die natuur!

Dit verstuom my gereeld as mense wat pas van een of ander wildpark afkom, verklaar hulle het “nie eintlik diere gesien nie” – dit net omdat hul nie die Groot Vyf gesien het nie! So, volgende keer as jy op jou stukkie grond rondstap – kyk bietjie mooi en jy sal verbaas wees oor die groot verskeidenheid plante, grasse en blomme in selfs net ‘n paar meter. Weens ‘n gebrek aan spasie kan ek nou nie foto’s van al die plante hier plaas nie, weereens sal my brief dan lank neem om af te laai maar ek hoop ek inspireer almal om bietjie dieper as net die voor-die-hand-liggende te kyk!

Ons is gelukkig om die afgelope klompie jare ‘n broeipaar laksmanne (*Lanius collaris*) wat naby ons huis nesmaak te hê. Dis asof hulle elke seisoen nader aan die huis nes bou – ek glo dis oor die nabijheid van drinkwater en lekker afvalhappies uit ons kombuis dalk! Die voëls is ook bekend as Fiskaallaksman of Jan Fiskaal.

Die kuikens is op die oomblik amper al twee keer hul ouers se grootte en mens sal dink hul kan nou al self jag. Maar nie hierdie mamma-se-kindjies nie – nee aldag en heeldag is dit ‘n gesmeekroep met trillende vlerkies en al, al agter die ouer aan vir nog en meer en nog! Ons kan nie help om te lag as mens na die reusebaba kyk wat al agter die ma of pa wip-vlieg - al om ons huis, binne hul habitat nie. Die arme oorwerkte ouerpaar moet net kos aandra vir ‘n vale of die oorverdowende gepiep verdra! Ek is seker die ouerpaar verloor ‘n hele paar gram gedurende die voertydperk!

Dis oulik om laatmiddag te sien hoe, as ek die voëls ‘n paar stukkies brood voer, die ma of pa neerswep en ‘n stukkie brood na die ewig-honger kleintjie wat in ‘n nabye tak sit, neem. Die mossies en vinke hou ook maar ‘n respektvolle afstand van hierdie vyand! Dan, net voor slaaptyd, neem die sorgsame ouer die kleinding na ‘n waterbak en terwyl die kleintjie op ‘n nabye tak sit en wag, sal ma of pa eers alle ander voëls verwilder. Dan vlieg die kleintjie af om vir oulaas sy dors te les met die ouer wat saamdrink en deurentyd ‘n oog hou!

In my naslaan van die voël is die meeste inligting in Engels en volgens bronne was die Noordelike en Suidelike fiskaal voorheen saamgegooi as "common fiscal" en dus sou ek sê dis die gewone laksman. Moet dit egter nie verwarring met die Suidelike Waterfiskaal nie – dis heeltemal 'n ander voël. In my Afrikaanse bronne word net verwys na die fiskaallaksman en bly ek dus daarby in my skrywe! Die Suidelike fiskaal is die een wat by ons voorkom. Hulle is monogaam en hoogs territoriaal. Die mannetjie sal 'n indringer mannetjie behoorlik met bek en kloue aanval en verwilder.

Die wyfie doen meestal die konstruksie van die nes wat 'n diep kelk met dik wande, lagerig in die mik van 'n kleinerige doringboom of bos gebou word. Die nes bestaan uit van blomknoppe, stukkies bas, vere, gras tot mos; selfs stukkies papier en lap, spinnerakke en kokonne word ingespan! Dit neem 2-3 dae vir die nes om gebou te word en 'n nuwe nes word elke nuwe broeiseisoen gebou. Daar word 2-3 maal per seisoen gebroei en tussen 1 en 5 eiers, maar meestal 2-4 ligkleurige, gespikkeld, eiers word gelê. Broeitydperk is tussen 12- en 16 dae. Die wyfie doen die broeiwerk en die eerste 2 weke is dit hoofsaaklik sy wat kos aandra vir die kleintjies, waarna die mannetjie begin hand bysit met die grootmaak van die kleintjies.

Die kleintjies bly in die nes tussen 14 en 21 dae. Alhoewel hul na 3 weke hul self kan voer bly hul afhanglik van die ouers en verlaat die ouers se habitat eers as hulle 4 maande oud is. Die kleintjies is glad nie swart-en-wit nie, maar het 'n meer vaalbruin gespikkeld voorkoms met swart-bruinerige strepe aan die onder- en bokant.

Die suksesvolle oorlewing van hierdie spesies is toe te skryf aan die wye verskeidenheid van voedsel wat hul eet en slim jagtegnieke. Die grootste deel van 'n volwassene se dag word gespandeer aan 'n sit-en-wag jagtegniek. Die voël kan ure lank doodstil op 'n hoë, prominente uitkykpunt sit en met hul skerp oë op die uitkyk wees vir prooi en dan geluidloos neerswep om die happie te kry. As die prooi klein genoeg is word dit daar en dan geëet, andersins sal dit op die uitkykpunt geëet word of op 'n doring of doringdraad wat hul as spens gebruik, gebêre word. Daar kan soms ry op ry prooi op die manier in 'n bepaalde spens gebêre word. So volgende keer as jy 'n ry goggas op jou draad sien hang – moenie Conserv bel nie, dis nie 'n "battle sign" nie, maar net die laksman se spens!

Hul dieet bestaan hoofsaaklik uit insekte, voëltjies, knaagdiere, slangetjies, verkleurmannetjies, motte, sprinkane – dis 'n ellelange lys - en sluit af en toe sade, asook afvalkos in. Soms word tot driekwart van hul dag spandeer aan sit en wag vir prooi. Waar sal ek nou so kan wag vir kos – ek jaag dadelik na die naaste Woolies koswinkel toe!

Die naam fiskaal het 'n interessante oorsprong en kom uit 'n oulike storie wat ek in The Guardian van 2011 opgespoor het. In die dae van die Hollands Oos-Indiese Kompanjie het die fiskaal, 'n belastinggaarder wat vir die kompanjie gewerk het, rondgegaan, aangetrek in swart en wit klere. Aan die einde van die fiskale jaar het hy die belasting, sonder enige genadebetoon

aan die mense, bymekaargemaak. Die arme mense is letterlik van hul swaarverdiende geld “berooft”, en is dan, soos die Engelse sê “left hanging out to dry” – presies net soos ons voël met sy prooi doen! Hierdie is ‘n algemene standvoël maar een van Afrika se pragtige voëls, kyk uit vir hulle in jou tuin.

Bronne: Birdlife SA, Roberts Voëlgids

Op liger trant: Hoe hou mens ‘n blondine heeldag besig? Sit haar in ‘n ronde vertrek en sê sy moet in die hoek gaan sit!

Goed: Jou seun verstaan die nuutste modes

Sleg: Hy is ‘n fopdosser

Lelik: Hy lyk beter as jou vrou!

‘n Dief storm ‘n winkel binne, gryp ‘n TV-stel en hardloop weg daarmee. Die blondine hardloop agter hom aan en skree: “Wag, wag, jy het die “remote” vergeet!”