

Celtis africana

Sterkfontein Country Estates October/Oktober 2015

Hello once again to all the Celtis friends!

Time certainly flies and before I know it, it is time to get another Celtis out! I usually have some sort of idea in my head, but then to get it researched, written and choose photos to go with it - well, it certainly makes for a mad rush sometimes! If it was all I had to do, it would have been easier, but, having said that - I do enjoy chatting to you every month!

One can certainly see the seasons have changed, not only by the plants that suddenly pop up or flower this time of the year, but all over in the garden and in the veld there are signs of new life. We found nests of the Crowned lapwings and the Blacksmith lapwings, and all day long the ever-hungry fiscal babies are begging for food in the acacia near the house. The Blacksmith lapwing's eggs have hatched, and a couple of days later, so did the Crowned lapwings.



Blacksmith Lapwing nest with eggs - note the darker mottling of these eggs, compared on the Crowned Lapwing eggs in the Afrikaans section (Photo: Elmarie Krige)



One day-old Blacksmith Lapwing chick trying to hide and blend in with its environment (Photo: Elmarie Krige)

I don't have a lot of time to visit the eagles this time around, but, certainly, Skye is growing like crazy, and is already a beautiful youngster. The darker feathers are appearing all over, although, as you will see from one photo - when the wind blows from behind, or it flaps and exercise the wings; the white feathers are still very much visible. The day I took these photos it was already "swimming" (lying flat on the nest and moving the wings in a swimming-like fashion) or sitting on top of the nest, rising up and flapping its wings, exercising it. The parents now only visit the nest to bring food. Soon Skye will start flying short distances but will remain close to the nest for quite a while.



Skye exercising its wings - note the white fluffiness on the top and underside of the wings (Photo: Elmarie Krige)

The most beautiful thing I have ever seen (and will never forget no matter how old I get, whether I go blind, or whatever) is when Kgosi brought a snake to the nest. It was so swift, so silent and smooth I did not even have time to get my camera ready - and nearly pulled all my hair out afterwards! But it is a sight I will never forget, this huge bird swooping down and "braking" with the wings stretched upwards and outwards, the clearly visible stripes inside the wings so typical of this eagle – a picture I will forever cherish in my mind's eye! Usually they stay to feed the chick, but I think he noticed me and basically just dropped the food and left. I did see however how Skye was devouring the meal! I have quite a few pictures of the parents sitting atop a tree, snake in beak, when Little Wing was a chick; but I have never witnessed this particular action of the eagle swooping down, huge snake in its beak, the way the wings were stretched...wonderful!

It is at times like this that I am so happy that we live out here! How many people, living in the city, can say they have found lapwings nests season after season, on their own property? Not many people witness the fluffy little chicks having hatched and growing into beautiful birds. Few people can say they feed mongoose daily, a little distance away from their house and see little ones growing into adults. On a regular basis I witness their goings-on and see how they interact with each other whilst feeding - it is interesting to observe their pecking order, who are the bullies and who are the timid ones! Even fewer city folk can say they have witnessed **and** could take photos of eagles mating, building a nest, the female on the nest, the chick hatching and growing into a beautiful bird, until it eventually leaves the nest and the area. Not forgetting the other birds we have witnessed over the years building their nests, laying eggs, the chicks hatching, getting fully fledged and eventually leaving the nest and later the area! Season after season we witness the different plants appearing, flowering and beautifying our veld. How I wish I could place photos of all the plants in flower right now, but then the Celtis would be too big to download! Do take a walk on your property – you'd be surprised at the very rich inheritance we have right here on our doorstep!



Hypoxis hemerocallidea ("African potato") (Photo: Elmarie Krige)



Babiana hypogea (Afr: Bobbejaanuintjie) (Photo: Elmarie Krige)



Boophane disticha (Poisonbulb/Kopseerblom) (Photo: Elmarie Krige)

We are all so blessed to experience a little bit of the “wild” so close at hand and we must appreciate it! Albert Einstein has said: “Look deep into nature and you will understand everything better.” I guess another way of saying it is take time, appreciate nature and by observing it, one learns a lot of why and how things work the way they do.

Plant of the month, and to me one of the most beautiful wild flowers of our area, is the lovely *Pachycarpus schinzianus*. The Afrikaans name for this plant is Bitterwortel, literally translated as bitterroot. Whenever the plant is damaged; a milky latex appears which is extremely bitter – hence the common name. This plant is currently not under threat, but, due to extensive harvesting (it is supposedly a medicinal plant) and the spread of urbanisation, it is disappearing fast.



Pachycarpus schinzianus (Bitter root/Bitterwortel) (Photo: Garfield Krige)

The common name *bitterwortel* is sometimes also used for *Xysmalobium undulatum*, which is a member of the same family and has more or less the same medicinal uses.

The Bitterwortel is widely used as a remedy for many ailments. The Manyika tribe (a Shona people) uses it as a so-called remedy against syphilis and to aid conception. The Dutch uses the powdered root as some kind of a remedy for haemorrhoids. Some locals made concoctions of the root to treat things like dropsy, dysentery and even snake bite.

The rootstock of Bitterwortel is mixed with the pounded root of *Xysmalobium undulatum* (member of the same family) to make Uzara medicine - a Xhosa name for this kind of medicine. This medicine is used for diarrhoea, dysentery and to soothe after-birth cramps. It is also used as some sort of tonic for the cardiovascular system.

All parts of the plant are extremely bitter and are used in various decoctions and infusions as emetic, diuretic and purgative medications. The roots are used by the Zulu people for ailments, such as indigestion. They also use it as medication for malaria and other fevers, including typhoid fever. Infusions of the root are used by the Xhosas to combat colic and abdominal troubles and they sniff the dried, pounded roots to relieve headaches.

However, these claims have not been sufficiently tested scientifically, and more research is needed; possible side effects are not known. So don't go and chew some bitterwortel thinking you can cure yourself of whatever ailment you might have! However it is apparently so bitter, you might just cure your illness after tasting it!

Just for fun:

John and Ian go to a pastry shop. John nips three cookies and puts it in his pocket without the baker noticing.

"See how clever I am, you'll never beat that," he whispers to Ian.

Ian goes up to the baker and says: "Give me three cookies and I will show you a magic trick." The baker, a little suspicious, hands him the cookies, which he promptly eats. **"So, what is the trick?" the baker asks annoyed.**

"Look inside John's pocket!" Ian replies.



One of our, rather large, colourful residents! Note the large "false eyes"! (Photo: Garfield Krige)

That's all from me folks, have a great October month and hold thumbs for lots of rain!

Goeie dag Celtis vriende!

Die tyd vlieg omtrent en as ek weer sien is dit tyd vir nog 'n Celtis brief. Gewoonlik het ek een of ander idee maar om dit geskryf te kry, al die navorsing te doen en die regte foto's uit te soek neem tyd en soms is dit maar 'n gejaag! Nogtans geniet ek dit om elke maand met julle te gesels!

Mens kan goed agterkom die seisoen het verander. Nie net is daar allerhande veldblomme wat nou kopuitsteek nie, maar oral anders is daar ook tekens van nuwe lewe. Ons het neste van die bontkiewiete sowel as van die kroonkiewiete op ons plot gekry, die laksmankleintjies is gedurig aan die smeek vir meer kos in die akasia naby ons huis en verder is meeste voëls of aan't nesbou of daar is alreeds 'n gepiep van kleintjies uit die neste. Toe ek hierdie begin skryf het, het die bontkiewiete al uitgebroei en die kroonkiewiete sowat 'n week later.



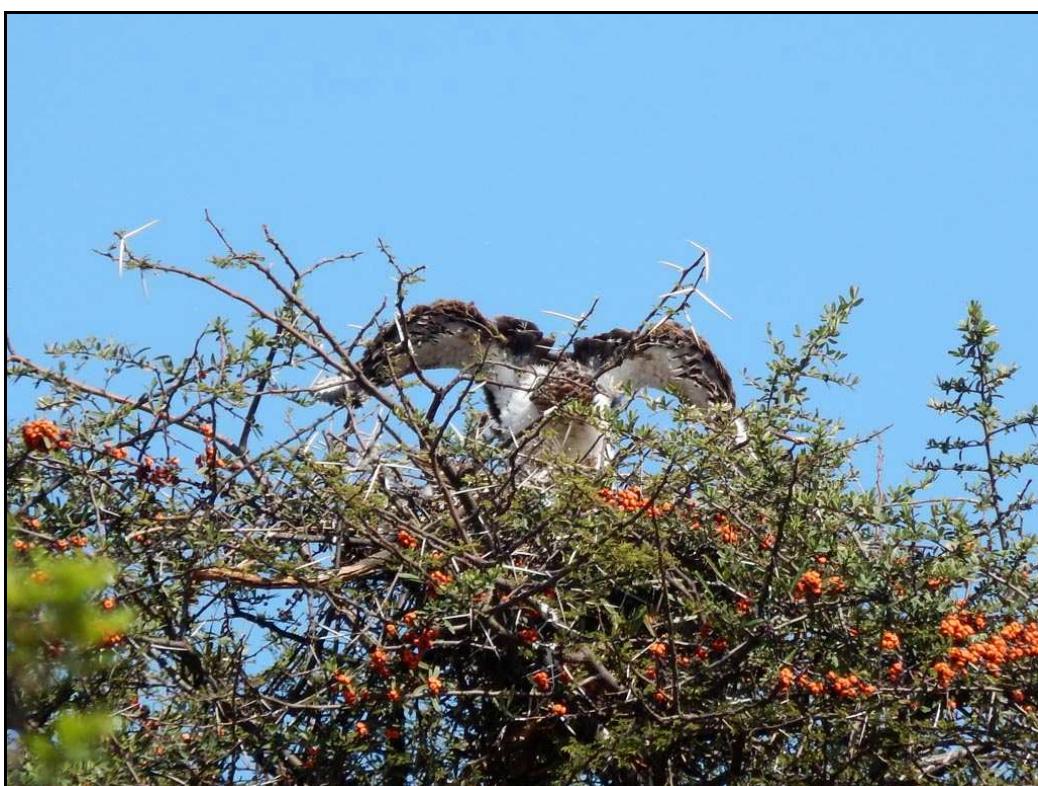
Kroonkiewiet nes met eiers - minder gevlek as die eiers van die bontkiewiet in die Engelse gedeelte
(Foto: Elmarie Krige)

Hierdie broeiseisoen het ek nie baie by die arend nes kon uitkom nie, maar die kere wat ek wel daar was, kon ek sien hoe het Skye al gegroei. Die donkerder vere is oraloor te siene, maar as die wind van agter die nekvere opwaai, of as die vlerke geoefen word, is die wit kuikendons nog duidelik te siene. Maar Skye is al pragtig groot en is gedurig besig om of plat bo-op die nes te lê en te swem of roei met die vlerke of hy sit regop bo-op die nes en rys regop met flappende vlerke – alles oefening, in voorbereiding vir die *Groot Vlieg* wat binnekort sal gebeur! Die ouers

kom nou meestal net nes toe om kos te bring. Voor mens weet sal hy klein entjies vlieg, maar steeds terugkeer na die nes en nog lank in die area bly.



"O my ma, maar dis warm! Skye - let op die oë is nog nie die kenmerkende heldergeel van die volwassenes nie (Foto: Elmarie Krige)



Skye besig on vlerkoefeninge te doen. Let op die wit donsvere op die bo- en onderkant van die vlerke (Foto: Elmarie Krige)

Iets wat ek nooit sal vergeet (al word ek ook horingoud of blind of wataokal), is die een oggend toe Kgosi 'n slang nes toe gebring het. Die een oomblik was daar niks en die volgende oomblik, geruisloos, is hy net daar, slang in die bek, met vlerke uitgestrek na bo om sy spoed te breek. Ek was baie naby en kon duidelik die kenmerkende strepe aan die binnekant van sy vlerke waarneem. Hoewel ek al vele kere (met Little Wing as kuiken), een van die ouers met 'n slang in die bek in 'n boom naby die nes gesien en kon afneem het, het ek nog nooit so 'n mooi gesig gesien nie. Die arend wat op die nes self land met uitgestrekte vlerke na bo – absoluut geruisloos en absoluut onvergeetlik! Natuurlik was my kamera nie reg en het ek slegs 'n stuk boom ingekry, want dit was so vinnig, maar nietemin sal ek dit vir altyd onthou! Meestal sal die ouers die slang voer, maar ek dink hy het my gewaar en net afgelaai en weer gevlieg! Ek kon darem sien hoe pluk ou Skye sy kos uitmekaar!

Dis sulke tye wat ek so bly is om hier te kan woon. Wie kan sê dat hul jaar na jaar kiewietneste opspoor op hul eiendom? Watter stadsjapie kan sê hul sien hoe die kleintjies uitgebroei het, hoe die donsballetjies saam met die ouers rondloop en as mens nader kom absoluut verdwyn in die veld? Ek is gelukkig genoeg om te sien hoe die donsballetjies groter word, vere kry en uiteindelik die area verlaat! Om nie te praat van al die ander voëls wat se broeiseisoen ons jaar na jaar meemaak! My groot plesier is om die rooimeerkatte te voer en vlak by hulle te staan en te sien hoe hulle eet, sommiges is heel saggeارد terwyl ander, wel, plein katterig is!

Watter stadsbewoner kan sê hy of sy het gesien **en** afgeneem hoe arende paar, nesbou, die wyfie sien broei en die kuiken sien grootword? Ek was so gelukkig om dit alles mee te maak en af te neem, tot en met die kuiken volwaardige vere kry en uiteindelik die nes verlaat – iets wat ek nooit sal vergeet nie! Seisoen na seisoen sien ons hoe die veld verander en plante verskyn en blom en leer hoe wonderlik ons planterfenis hier is. Ons kan regtig ons seënninge tel en werklik probeer om ons area mooi op te pas! Ek weet hoe baie mense ons beny oor ons eie stukkie "wilde Afrika"! Ek wens net ek kon foto's van elke liewe plant wat nou blom plaas, maar dan sal hierdie Celtis heeltemal te groot wees om af te laai, daar is regtig soveel! Stap tog bietjie rond op jou erf, jy sal verstom wees oor ons rykdom van plante!



Boopane disticha (Kopseerblom) (Foto: Elmarie Krige)



Sphenoseylis angustifolia (Wilde-ertjie/Wild sweetpea) (Foto: Elmarie Krige)



Vernonia galpinii (Perskwasbossie) (Foto: Elmarie Krige)

My plant vir die maand is die pragtige *Pachycarpus schinziatus* oftewel Bitterwortel soos dit beter bekend is. Die plant kry sy naam omdat, as dit op enige plek beskadig word, daar 'n uiters bitter, melkerige sap, uitkom. Op hierdie stadium word die plant nie as bedreigd beskou nie, maar omdat dit intensief ge-oes word (dit het klaarblyklik medisinale eienskappe) en ook as gevolg van verstedeliking, is dit besig om stadig maar seker te verdwyn.



Pachycarpus schinziatus (Bitterwortel) (Foto: Garfield Krige)

Soms word die naam bitterwortel ook gebruik vir die *Xysmalobium undulatum*, wat van dieselfde plantfamilie afkomstig is en ook min of meer oor dieselfde medisinale eienskappe beskik.

Die Bitterwortel word wyd gebruik as 'n geneesmiddel vir talle ongesteldhede. Die Manyika stam (Shonas) gebruik dit as 'n sogenaamde kuur teen sifilis en om vrugbaarheid aan te help. Hollanders gebruik die verpoeierde wortels as een of ander kuur teen aanbeie. Inheemse stamme maak ook konkoksies van die wortels om dinge soos edeem (watersug), buikloop en glo ook slangbyt te genees.

Die wortelstok van die Bitterwortel, gemeng met die fyngestampte wortel van die *Xysmalobium undulatum* (lid van dieselfde familiegroep), word gebruik om Uzara medisyne te maak. Hierdie is 'n Xhosa naam vir die spesifieke soort medisyne. Hierdie medikamente word gebruik vir diarree, omgekrapte maag en ook glo om nageboorte krampe en pyne te verlig. Dit word ook gebruik as 'n sogenaamde tonikum vir die kardiovaskulêre sisteem.

Alle dele van die plant is ongelooflik bitter en word in verskeie dekonkoksies en aftreksels gebruik in allerhande purgeer-, diuretiese- en purgatiewe middels. Die wortels word baie deur die Zulus gebruik vir kwale soos slegte spysvertering, teen malaria en ander koorstoestande, insluitende maagkoers. Die Xhosas gebruik aftreksels van die fyngestampte, gedroogde wortels, om hoofpyn te verlig.

Onthou egter daar is nog nie genoegsame navorsing op die tipe aansprake en/of die newe-effekte met die gebruik van die plant gedoen nie. Baie meer wetenskaplike navorsing is nodig, so moet nou nie aan 'n bitterwortel gaan staan en kou en dink jy kan jou kwinte en kwale self genees nie! Aan die ander kant is dit glo so erg bitter, jy skrik jouself dalk sommer gesond as jy dit proe!

Net vir die grap:

Net voor die fliek begin, staan die blondine op en skuifel verby almal om uit te gaan.

'n Ou vererg hom en sê, "Kon jy nou nie maar lankal uitgegaan het nie?"

Die blondine antwoord hom, "Duh, hulle het nou net eers op die skerm gewys alle selfone moet af wees en myne lê in my kar!"

Tot volgende maand, geniet Oktober en hopelik kry ons binnekort hope reën!

Bronne en erkennings/References and acknowledgements: Field Guide to the Wild Flowers of the Highveld: Van Wyk, Braam Malan, Sasa; Plantzafrica.com; Wikipedia

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

