

# *Celtis africana*

Sterkfontein Country Estates

September 2013

This month I want to write about a tree that is a bit of a stepchild as far as trees are concerned. It does not grow as tall and proud as the white stinkwood, nor is it blessed with fluffy yellow flowers like some of the *acacia* species, but such a useful tree to have in the garden! It is none other than the humble karee – *Searsia lancea*, *Searsia pyroides* and *Searsia pendulina*. It used to be in the *Rhus* genus, but that has changed and all the karees have been placed in the *Searsia* genus. *Searsia*, named after Paul B. Sears (1891-1990 who was head of Yale School of Botany. And if you think this is a boring choice – read on, this is a very interesting tree!

*Searsia lancea*, or black karee (black because the bark is a very dark brownish black colour) and the trifoliate leaves are in the shape of a lance - hence the *lancea*! The black karee occurs naturally on our Estate and is very hardy, evergreen, frost-resistant tree and grows in almost any soil condition and can serve as a windbreak. Insects and bees love the flowers – note beekeepers! Birds relish the fruit and the tree is host to quite a number of butterfly species.

*Searsia pyroides*, also occurs naturally on the Estate. It is better known as the taaibos, common wild currant or fire-thorn karee, because of the hard spiky thorn-like growths on the stem. *Pyroides* is from the Greek word *pyros*, meaning fire and this is because of the burning sensation when pricked by one of the thorns.

My favourite is *Searsia pendulina* or the white karee. *Pendulina* is for the graceful drooping appearance of the branches. The bark is of a much lighter colour, hence the name white karee. All karee trees are very hardy, evergreen and frost resistant and form good windbreaks. The white karee is a fast-growing tree. Wildlife will, in case of drought, survive by eating the leaves. The fruits of all *Searsia* species are edible and are rich in carbohydrates, forming an important part of the diet of many people in the more arid parts of southern Africa. The pliant branches have been used by the Nama to make fish traps, baskets and whips and strong, flexible bows. Stronger stems were used to make the framework for matjieshuise (mat houses). The bark is also used in tanning.

Another interesting fact of the karee is that the male and female flowers are borne on separate trees! The flowers are usually yellow-green and inconspicuous and the fruit are small, round, waxy green berries, ripening to reddish-brown. But the most interesting thing is that the fruit has been used by the Khoi for ages to make a kind of refreshing mead (honey beer) by adding honey to it! The name karee is said to be derived from the original Khoi word !kare (or kirrie) their name for the mead! The fruit can also be mixed with

*Acacia karoo* gum to make a sticky sweet that apparently tastes a bit like dates.

**Now how about we plant millions of karee trees and make our very own beer – Sterkfontein Homebrew!**

(Sources: Grobler. A; Field Guide to Trees of Southern Africa – Van Wyk. B, Van Wyk. P; Plantzafrica.com)



**Left/Links: Leaf of the white karee/Blaar van die witkaree**  
**Right/Regs: Leaf of the black karee (notice the spear-like appearance)/Blaar van swart karee (let op die lans- of spiesagtige voorkoms)**



**Unripe fruit of the karee/Groen vruggies van die karee**



**Flowers of the karee/Blommetjies van die karee**

Die maand skryf ek graag oor 'n amperse stiefkind van ons boomsoorte. Dit groei dalk nie so hoog en trots soos die witstinkhout nie en is ook nie geseënd met pragtige geel blommetjies soos sommige van ons *Acacia* spesies nie. Tog is dit 'n interessante en nuttige boom om in die tuin te he. Dis die *Searsia* – *Searsia lancea*, *Searsia pyroides* en *Searsia pendulina* - oftewel die karee! Voordat julle dink dis nou 'n vervelige keuse, lees gerus en julle sal verbaas wees oor hoe bruikbaar hierdie boom regtig is! Dit was voorheen vervat in die *Rhus* genus, maar is nou geplaas in die *Searsia* genus. *Searsia* vernoem na Paul B. Sears (1891-1990), wat die hoof van Yale School of Botany was.

*Searsia lancea*, is so genoem vanweë die blare wat in voorkoms soos 'n lans of spies is. Die stam is 'n baie donkerbruin-swart kleur – dus swartkaree! Die swartkaree kom natuurlik voor op ons Estate, is baie gehard en ryp-bestand, immergroen en vorm 'n windskeerm en dus ideaal om hier te plant. Hierdie bome groei in omtrent enige grondsoort. Die boom lok insekte en bye en voëls is versot op die vruggies. So, byeboere, plant gerus! Dit is ook 'n gasheer vir verskeie skoenlappersoorte.

*Searsia pyroides* se naam is afgelei van die Griekse woord *pyros*, wat vuur beteken. Sou jy gekrap word deur een van die harde doringagtige uitsteeksels, sal jy weens die brandende sensasie, gou die konneksie verstaan! Ons ken dit natuurlik as die taaibos of ook soms wilde rosyntjiesbos. Die taaibos kom ook natuurlik voor op ons Estate.

*Searsia pendulina*, die witkaree, is my gunsteling. Hierdie snelgroeiende boom is ook gehard en immergroen en die moeite werd om te plant. In gevalle van kwaai droogte sal wild oorleef deur die blare te vreet. Alle *Searsia* se

vruggies is eetbaar, ryk aan koolhidrate en vorm 'n belangrike deel van die dieet vir mense in die droë suidelike gedeeltes van Afrika. Die buigbare takkies is deur die Nama gebruik om visvanghokke van te maak, asook swepe en sterk, buigbare boë. Die sterker takke is gebruik om raamwerk vir matjiesgoedhuise te maak. Die bas is ook gebruik in leerlooierij.

Interessant is dat die vroulike en manlike blommetjies nie aan dieselfde boom gedra word nie. Die blommetjies van die karee is oor die algemeen geelgroen van kleur en mens sien dit nie juis raak nie. Die vruggies is klein, rond, wasagtig en groen en word ryp tot 'n donker rooibruin. Wat baie interessant is, is dat die vruggies deur die Khoi gebruik word om 'n tipe heuningbier van te brou! Die naam karee is blykbaar afgelei van die Khoi-woord !kare (of kirrie) – die oorspronklike Khoiwoord vir die bier! Blykbaar kan die vruggies ook met boomgom van die *Acacias* gemeng word om taai soetgoed (wat glo na dadels smaak) te maak.

### **Ek sê kom ons plant hektaarsvol kareebome en maak ons eie bier – Sterkfontein Dop-met-skop!**

(Bronne: Grobler. A; Field Guide to Trees of Southern Africa – Van Wyk. B, Van Wyk. P; Plantzafrica.com)

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With the season changing, I have noticed a lot of “goings on” with the bird life on the Estate. Feathers are being fluffed, mating calls have started and one can see spring is in the air! A bird that I love is the spotted thick-knee (*Burhinus capensis*). It is sometimes hard to spot in the open grassland it favours, because of its brown-and-white speckled feathers. The big yellow eyes are another feature of this long-legged bird. This bird is monogamous – so no messing around with other females! It hunts only on the ground, feeding mainly on insects, termites and lizards (and on our property loving a piece of brown bread every afternoon when I am feeding my dogs!)

Typically, two to three eggs are laid in a nest, scraped together on the ground and lined with grasses, feathers, animal droppings or stone chips. Both parents help incubate and rear the offspring; both bringing food to the nest. The chicks leave the nest within 24 hours of hatching. When threatened, the chicks crouch and remain motionless in the grass, whilst the adults often pretend to have a broken back, wing or leg, trying to distract predators. The thick-knee is supposed to be mainly nocturnal, but what fascinates me, is that they seem to be always up and about and awake! I have never seen it relaxed, sitting down or sleeping - be it day or night!

(Sources: Roberts Bird Guide – Chittenden. H; Birdlife International; Wikipedia)





**Thick Knee adult/Dikkop Volwassene**



**Thick Knee Chick/Dikkop Kuiken**

Lente is beslis in die lug as mens net kyk na die gedrag van die veervolk op ons Estate! Skielik begin die mannetjies pronk en allerhande roepgeluide word gehoor om wyfies te beïndruk. Ek is gek oor die dikkop (*Burhinus capensis*) – of dan gewone dikkop, met sy snaakse draffie, lang bene en groot geel oe! Met sy gespikkelde bruin-en-wit vere sien mens hom nie maklik raak in die oop veld wat hy as habitat verkies nie. Hierdie koddige voel is monogaam – geen gekafoefelry met ander wyfies nie! Die dikkop jag net grondlangs en leef meestal van insekte, termiete en klein akkedissies – en op

ons plot is daar een wat laatmiddag 'n stukkie bruinbrood kom geniet as ek my honde kosgee!

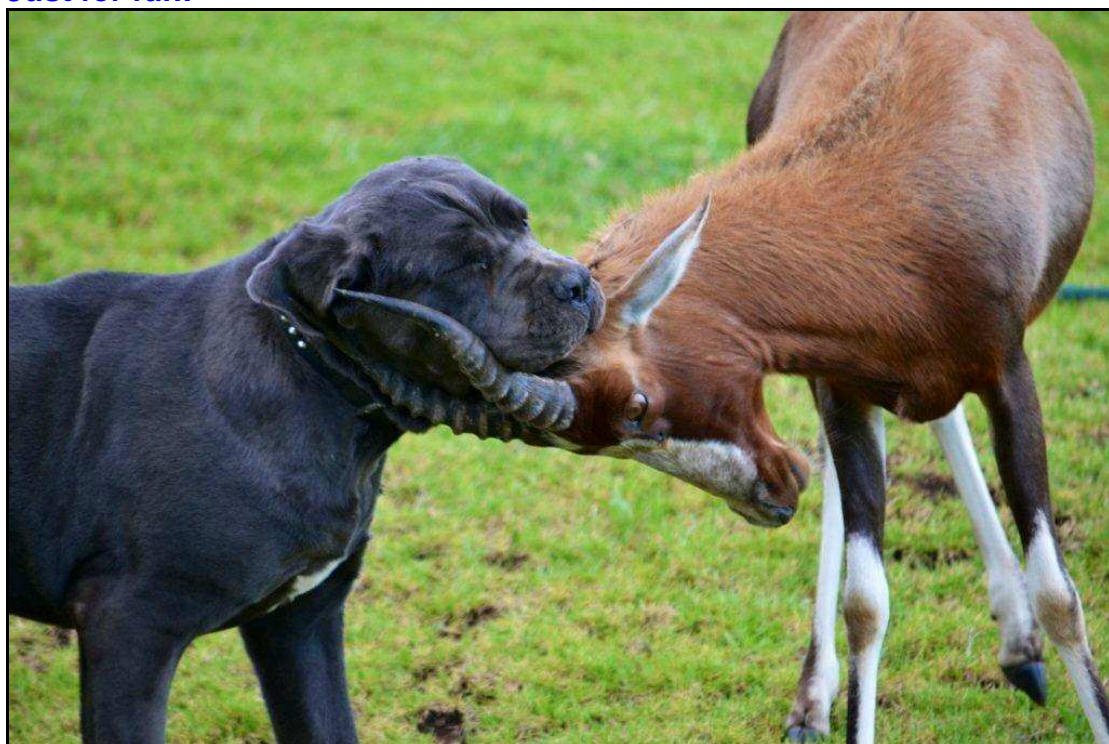
Die nes is sommer op die harde grond en bestaan uit stukkie klip, mis, vere en grassies wat bymekaargeskraap word. Gewoonlik word 2-3 eiers gele en beide ouers broei op die eiers. Albei versorg ook die kuikens en bring kos na die nes. Die kuikens is binne 24 uur uit die nes. Wanneer dit in gevaar is, sal dit bewegingloos in die gras op een plek gaan sit, terwyl die ouers predatore met 'n kamma-besering aan die vlerk of been of rug weglok van die kleintjie. Dis hoofsaaklik 'n nagvoël, maar wat, ek sien dit altyd aan die gang en aan't rondraf – dag of nag! Wanneer hulle nou eintlik slaap sal ek graag wil weet!

(Bronne: Roberts Voëlgids – Chittenden, H; Wikipedia)

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On a lighter note: Two boys were walking home from church after hearing a strong preaching about the devil. One said to the other, 'So, what do you think of all this Satan stuff?' The other replies, 'Well, you know how Santa Claus turned out. Its probably just your dad.'

**Just for fun:**



Peter's Neapolitan mastiff having a tussle with his friend the Blesbok – they grew up together and this is how they play every morning! Peter se hondevriend met sy blesbokvriend – so speel hul glo elke more! (Photo: Peter Botha SCE153)





Visitors over our Estate. Vroegoggend gaste! (photo: Garfield Krige SCE129)

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Transvaal Gecko or Transvaal Thick-toed Gecko (*Pachydactylus affinis*)  
Transvaal geitjie (A)

I found this little guy under a rock, a regular in most homes.

**Transvaal Gecko or Transvaal Thick-toed Gecko** (*Pachydactylus affinis*)

Transvaal geitjie (A)

**Size:** 6,8cm

**Age:** No data available – probably the same as most geckos, i.e. +/- 5 years

**Colour and appearance:** Rounded snout, short thick body and the tail is thick. The toes are short and distinctly broader at the ends. Greyish above, irregularly spotted all over with dark brown; a dark brown streak on each side of the head, passing through the eye; lower parts white. Head covered with minute granules, which are larger on the snout. The immature is more finely spotted. The large eyes set within the chubby head indicates it is mostly nocturnal.

**Habitat and food:** Spends days mostly under stones, rocks or logs. It hunts for moths, termites, beetles and other insects. Sometimes seen in homes where it will be hunting for insects.

**Breeding habits:** Lays two hard-shelled eggs in early spring.

**Enemies:** Sometimes birds, bigger lizards, some snakes and frogs and domesticated pets as well as the use of pesticides by humans.



**Tropical house gecko (*Hemidactylus mabouia*) Tropiese huisgeitjie (A)**

### **Tropical house gecko (*Hemidactylus mabouia*)**

Tropiese huisgeitjie (A)

This is the tropical house gecko (*Hemidactylus mabouia*). It lives off mosquitoes, spiders, cockroaches, moths and other insects and should be very welcome in our homes. It is nocturnal and makes clicking sounds. The large eyes do not have moving eyelids and it is cleaned after a meal by licking it. When threatened, it can throw off its tail to distract its predator – this is called autotomy. The tail can grow back but it will not be able to throw it off a second time! Interestingly a species exist whereby the female can reproduce without having mated with a male – a process called parthenogenesis.

Die outjie het ek onder 'n klip gekry – 'n gereelde besoeker in huise waar hul leef van muskiete en motte asook spinnekoppe en ander insekte. Dus kan ons hom gerus verwelkom in ons huise! Dit is die tropiese huisgeitjie



(*Hemidactylus mabouia*). Die geitjie is snags aktief en maak 'n tipe tik-tik geluid. Die groot oë het geen ooglid en na etes maak hy sy oog skoon deur dit te lek. Wanneer dit in gevaar verkeer word die stert afgegooi om predatore se aandag af te trek – dit word outotomie genoem. Die stert groei weer aan maar kan nie weer outotomiseer nie! Wat interessant is, is dat daar 'n verskynsel genaamd partenogenese by sekere geitjies voorkom. Dit beteken die wyfie kan voortplant sonder dat sy met 'n mannetjie hoef te paar!

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Net vir die grap:

Goed : Jy vertel jou 10-jarige dogtertjie van die voëltjies en die bytjies

Sleg: sy val jou voortdurend in die rede

Lelik: .... met korreksies

