

Celtis africana

Sterkfontein Country Estates September 2016

Good day folks!

Spring is definitely in the air - birds are busy with nest building; at night the Thick-knees are very vocal with love calls and the lapwings are noisily guarding their nest if we dare come close; soon we will have little fluff balls running around! As we have quite a few fishponds and water features, there are lots of frogs on our property and boy, are THEY vocal at night! We can barely hear the TV!

Now we just need good rains to liven up the veld. However, I have heard the drought could be continuing this season, but lets hope and pray that the weather guys are wrong!



Left: Crowned Lapwing eggs (Photo: Garfield Krige) Right: Spotted Thick-Knee Eggs (Cell phone photo: Alicia Grobler). Note the finer pattern on the Spotted Thick-Knee's eggs. Although the photos do not show it, the Lapwing's eggs are a bit smaller than those of the Spotted Thick-Knee



"Get away from my nest!!! Crowned Lapwing (Photo: Elmarie Krige)

A couple of weeks ago we got a WhatsApp from Michael van Harmelen (SCE 157) with a photo of an African Spoonbill, (*Platalea alba*) wading and feeding at the Rietspruit vlei near the entrance. Now that was exciting, as we have never seen them around here before - so thank you Michael! I love it when other residents let us know about things like this – we can't be everywhere and don't go to town every day so it is great when other residents report sightings!

Garfield eagerly headed down to the vlei with all his photographic paraphernalia and got some lovely photos too. A couple of days later when we went to town we noticed that he (or she!) brought a friend along and they were quite aggressive towards some of the Ibises – as if they had sole ownership of the vlei! Michael told us he also noticed a pair. They definitely come and go, some days we see them, other days not! Their habitat is on the shallow side of water (rivers, vlei areas) and they feed on small fish and small invertebrates.



African Spoonbill (centre), with African Sacred Ibis (front) and Black-Headed Heron (back left) (Cell phone photo: Michael van Harmelen SCE157)



"Hey, This is **my** vlei!" African Spoonbill showing aggression towards the African Sacred Ibis. Note the raised feathers on its head (Photo: Garfield Krige)

What is very interesting is that they have blue eyes - and of course I wondered why some birds have certain eye colours. Eye colours are even more varied in birds than what it is in humans – there are birds with blue eyes, brown, black, yellow – even red!

There can be many reasons for the different eye colours – it can determine the age of a bird. Our Black-Chested Snake Eagles are a good example: the chick has blue-grey eyes and it changes until it becomes the beautiful bright yellow the adults are known for. The adult male Saddle-billed Stork has dark brown eyes while the adult female has bright yellow eyes! So in some species the eyes are an indication of the sex of the bird.

In some bird species the eye colour actually changes during breeding season! There is the possibility that colouration is caused by the chemical make-up of the eye, or it could simply be that the iris colour is helpful to birds that live predominantly in certain light conditions. Now is that interesting or what!

Then Michael WhatsApped us just the other night about another eagle he spotted early one morning at the vlei area. From what he described (he also checked a source to confirm) it definitely seems to be a Long-crested Eagle (*Lophaetus occipitalis*)! This is very special! Garfield saw one quite some time ago on a fence next to the N14 near Laurentia farm, so it seems that they are definitely living in the area. They are very distinct birds with their long crests, so well spotted Michael! I am quite jealous, as I have not seen one of these stunning birds as yet. The Long-crested Eagles prefer moist, wooded areas, bordering a grassland and close to a vlei or swamp as their habitat. They feed mainly on rodents and especially vlei rats; frogs and other reptiles and also insects, but hardly ever birds.



Look who also came to visit! An adult and juvenile African Grey Hornbill (Afr. Grysneushoringvoël) (Photo: Garfield Krige)

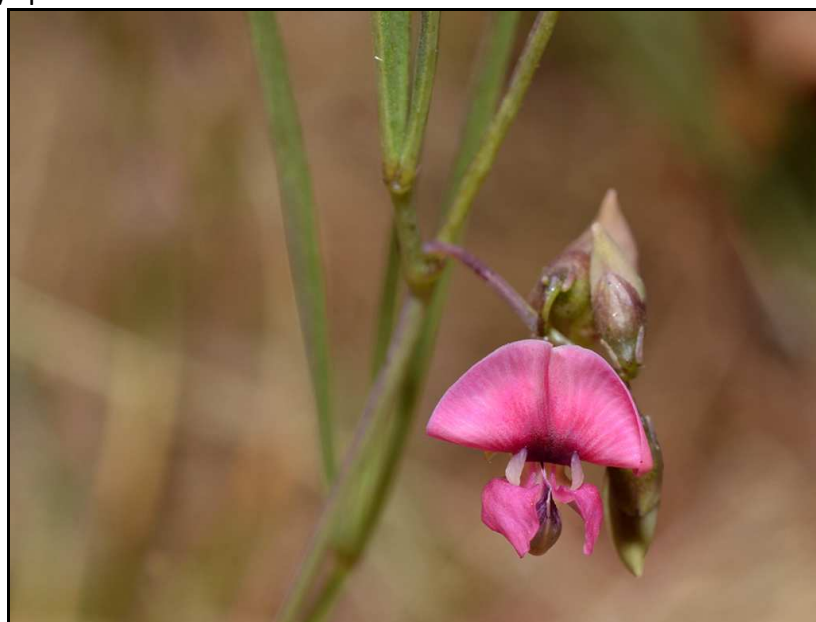
I also noticed a new bird in our garden and at first Garfield thought it was a Magpie Mannikin, but I disagreed as it did not have the white marking above the beak nor the white markings on the wings and its chest was white. So eventually we found it to be a Thick-billed Weaver (*Amblyospiza albifrons*). Their habitat is also vlei areas and near rivers. They feed on seeds, fruit and insects.

Every year we are so excited when we see the first Harveyas on our property. How these fragile-looking flowers manage to push through the rock hard soil of the veld never ceases to amaze me! Just try and dig a hole in the veld, man you'd have to swallow a handful of Voltarens afterwards, it is such a task! And yet, year after year they appear and what a joy to see them.



Harveya pumila (ink flower) (Photo: Garfield Krige)

Also recently spotted:



Tephrosia capensis (Photo Garfield Krige)



Gnidia kraussiana (Afr. Harige gifbossie) (Photo: Garfield Krige)



Hermannia depressa (Afr: Rooiopslag) (Photo: Garfield Krige) See the actual size in the Afrikaans section



Helichrysum argyrosphaerum (Afr. Popposie) (Photo: Elmarie Krige)



Gazania krebsiana (Afr. Botterblom, Eng: Buttercup) (Photo: Garfield Krige)

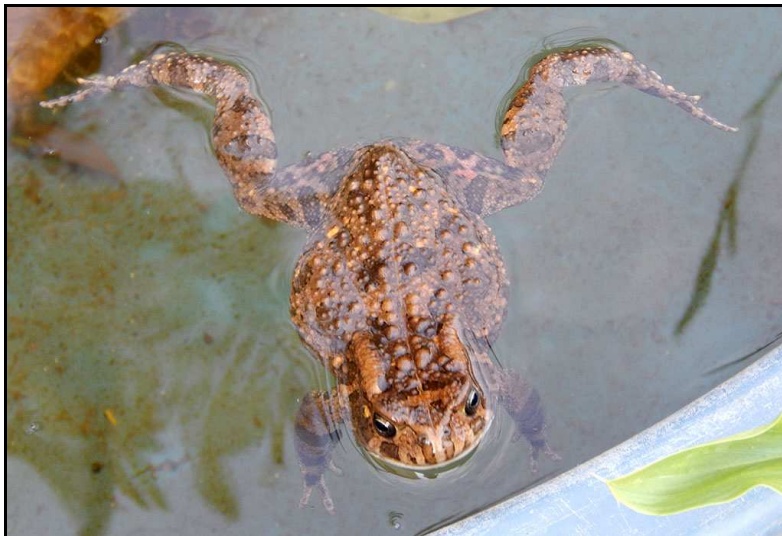
Despite no rains as yet, it is quite amazing how many flowers are seen on our property! Have a look on yours they are there! There are so many flowers out now, however, it is impossible to feature photos of all the flowers, which are out now - the Celtis would be way too big!

Well folks, from birds and frogs to veld flowers – I hope you enjoyed this edition of the Celtis and till we chat again next month - enjoy your property. And hold thumbs for some rain – we really need it!

Goeie dag vriende!

Lente is verseker in die lug – oral is voëltjies besig met nesbou, die Dikkoppe sing amper heelnag liefdesliedjies op ons grasperk en die kroonkiewiete val ons verwoed aan as ons dit net naby hul nes waag. Een van die dae het ons weer donsballietjies wat oral rondhardloop! Ons het 'n paar visdammetjies en waterpunte en natuurlik het ons dus hope paddas op ons plot. En kan die paddakoor nou luidkeels sing saans – ons kan skaars die televisie hoor bo die lawaai!

Nou het ons tog net goeie reëns nodig om die veld mooi groen te maak. Ek het egter gehoor ons gaan nog 'n droë jaar tegemoet, maar laat mens maar hoop die weerouens is dalk verkeerd.



"Ek sing bas in die paddakoor!" (Foto: Elmarie Krige)

So paar weke gelede kry Garfield 'n WhatsApp van Michael van Harmelen (SCE 157) met 'n foto van 'n Lepelaar (*Platalea alba*), besig om by die vleiarea rond te stap en te vroetel vir happies in die water. Baie goeie nuus want daar was nog nie voorheen van hulle nie – so dankie Michael! Dis so lekker as ander inwoners ons van dinge laat weet – ons kan tog nie altyd oral wees en ons gaan ook nie elke dag dorp toe nie.

Garfield is toe sommer vinnig af vlei toe met sy kamera en goeters en het sommer ook paar mooi foto's kon kry. Hy het nogals heel aggressief teenoor die ander ibisse geraak – dis mos nou **sy** vlei, alla wêreld! 'n Paar dae later toe ons dorp toe gaan sien ons hy (of is

dit nou sy!) het 'n maatjie saamgenooi na die nuwe "restaurant". Michael het laat weet hy het ook opgemerk dat daar twee van hulle rondstap in die vlei. Hul habitat is vlak waterrande en hul eet hoofsaaklik klein vissies en klein ongewerwelde diertjies. Maar sommige dae is hul glad nie te siene en ander dae is hul lyk my weer heeldag daar.



Lepelaar wat eet dat die water spat! Die foto hieronder wys veral die oogkleur (Fotos: Garfield Krige)



Interessant genoeg het die Lepelaar blou oë en het ek gewonder oor die rede daarvoor. Oogkleur onder voëls is nog meer gevarieerd as in die mens – sekere voëls het blou oë, ander bruin, swart, geel – selfs rooi!

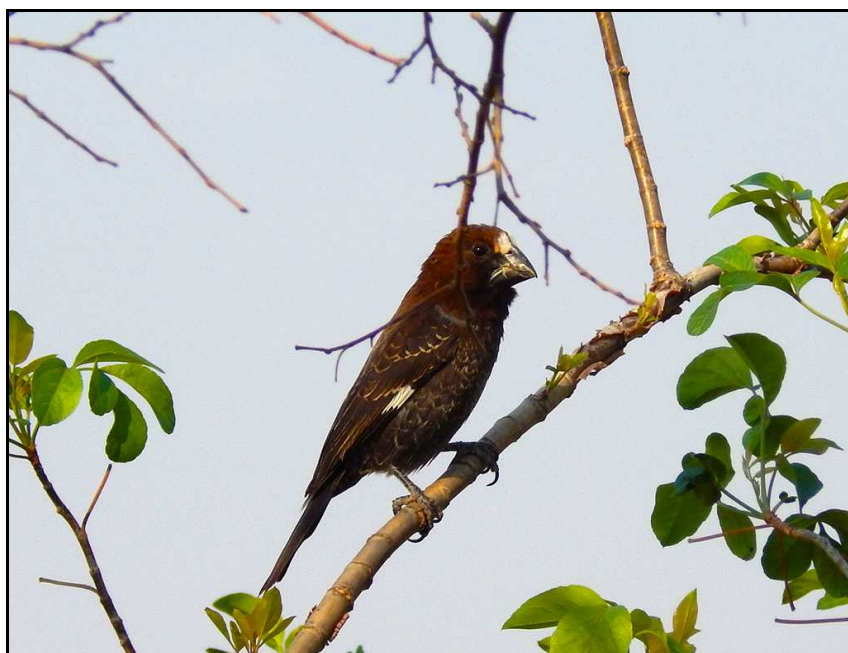
Daar kan verskillende redes hiervoor wees. Een rede kan toegeskryf word aan die ouderdom van die voël – ons Swartborsslangarende is 'n goeie voorbeeld: die kuiken het grysblou oë en dit verander mettertyd na die heldergeel waarvoor hulle so bekend is. Die volwasse manlike Saalbekooievaar het byvoorbeeld donkerbruin oë terwyl die volwasse wyfie heldergeel oë het! Dus, in sekere spesies is die oogkleur 'n indikasie van die geslag van die voël.

In ander voëlspesies verander kleur weer na gelang van die broeiseisoen! Daar is die waarskynlikheid dat kleur veroorsaak word deur die chemiese saamstelling van die oog. Dit kan eenvoudig ook wees dat die iris se kleur 'n spesie help inpas waar hul habitat oorheersend in sekere lig toestande is. Baie interessant!

En toe, net die ander aand, laat weet Michael ons oor 'n arend wat hy naby die vlei-area by die ingang in 'n boom sien sit het. Wat hy beskryf het (hy het ook self 'n bron nagegaan) moet dit beslis 'n Langkuifarend (*Lophætus occipitalis*) wees! Nou dis spesiaal! Lank gelede het Garfield een op 'n draad langs die N14 naby Laurentia plaas sien sit, so hulle kom beslis in ons area voor. Met die besonderse lang kuif is die arend maklik uitkenbaar – so welgedaan Michael! Ek is sommer vrekjaloers want ek het nog nooit self een gesien nie!

Die Langkuifarend se habitat is klam boomveld naby graslande aangrensend aan vleie of moerasse. Hulle leef hoofsaaklik van knaagdiere en veral vleirotte, paddas en ander reptiele asook insekte maar amper nooit voëls nie.

Die ander dag het ek ook 'n nuwe voëltjie in ons tuin opgemerk en eers dag Garfield dis 'n Dikbekfret maar ek het van hom verskil. Die fret het nie die wit bokant die snawel en ook nie die wit merke op sy vlerke en sy bors is wit. Na 'n bietjie speurwerk vind ons toe uit dis die Dikbekwewer (*Amblyospiza albifrons*). Die voëltjie se habitat is naby vlei areas of riviere en hul leef van sade, vrugte en insekte.

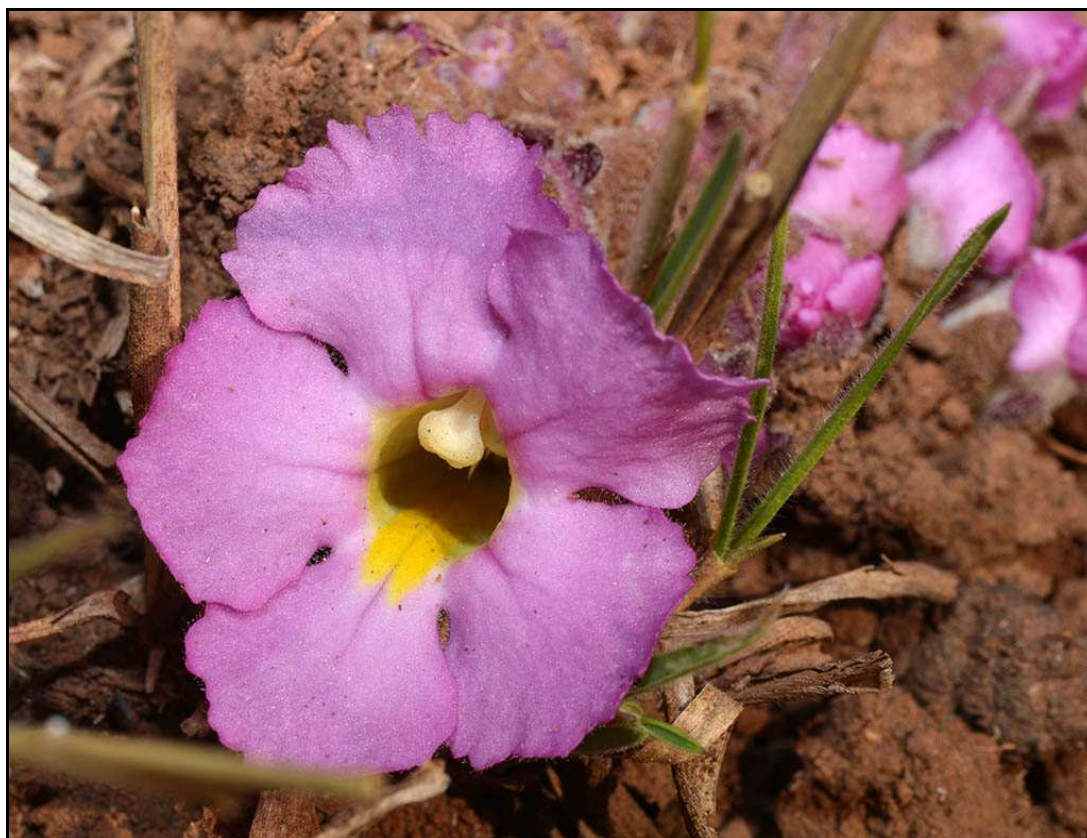


Dikbekwewer (Eng. Thick-Billed Weaver) (Foto: Elmarie Krige)



Nog 'n kuiergas - die Bokmakierie! (Fotos: Elmarie Krige)

Jaar na jaar is ons opgewonde as ons die eerste Harveyas op ons stukkie grond sien. Hoe hierdie sagte blommetjies dit regkry om hul blomknoppe deur die klipharde grond in die veld te stoot is vir my altyd 'n wonderwerk! Probeer jy nou net 'n gat grou en dis ampers onmoontlik - jy sal sommer 'n handvol Voltarens moet sluk! Tog is hul jaar na jaar te siene en ons is nog elke keer verras en opgewonde as ons die mooi pienk blommetjies opmerk!



Harveya pumila (Afr: Inksblom) (Foto: Garfield Krige)

Hier is nog 'n paar blomme wat nou hul verskyning gemaak het:



Hermannia depressa (Afr: Rooiopslag) Die muntstuk wys die werklike grootte van die blommetjies (Foto: Garfield Krige)



Ledebouria ovatifolia (Foto: Garfield Krige)



Becium obovatum (Afr. Katsnor, Eng. Cat's whiskers). Wie sien die vlieggie raak?! (Foto: Garfield Krige)

Ten spyte van geen reën tot op hede blom hulle in ons veld - kyk gerus in die veld op jul eiendom – hulle *is* daar! Dis egter onmoontlik om foto's van al die plante wat nou blom te plaas - die Celtis sal heeltmal te groot wees om uit te stuur!

Nou-ja vriende, van voëls en paddas tot veldblomme – ek hoop julle het hierdie Celtis geniet. Tot volgende maand, hou duimvas vir reën, die stof maak van my ook sommer 'n Dikbekwewer!

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



Bronne/Acknowledgements: Field Guide to the Wild Flowers of the Highveld – Van Wyk.Braam, Malan. Sasa; Wild Flowers of the Magaliesberg – Kevin Gill, Andry Engelbrecht; Roberts voëlgids – Hugh Chittenden;10000birds.com