

## *Celtis africana*

Sterkfontein Country Estates

June/Junie 2014

Good day Celtis friends!

Here we are, smack bang in June and the days are still wonderful and warm – no sign of Mr Jack Frost as yet. However, by the time this goes out, things may have changed, but in the meantime, we are enjoying the bonus of warm, sunny days!

Most people dislike winter – it's cold, the veld seems bare and nothing much is happening. However, before the serious veldfires start, look around you. The wind rippling through the golden grass, the intense blue of the Highveld skies which have inspired many a poet and writer over the years and notice the little flames of the aloes coming into flower – there is beauty in every season! Have look at the photo of a Grey go-away bird against the lovely blue wintry sky – THIS is what I am talking about!



Of course winter has many other pleasures – crusty homemade bread (the smell of mine baking in the oven as I am writing this, makes me salivate!) with some hearty home-made soup; a glass of red wine with a handful of biltong front of the fire, or some hot chocolate drank snuggling under a blanket – it's the little pleasures that makes winter a season to be cherished in it's own way!

The aloes in our veld is maybe not as tall or as spectacular as some species, but they do provide some colour and nectar for certain insects and birds, so let us not

overlook or ignore them! Look at the lovely photo I took of them amongst the tall wintry grasses – if that isn't beautiful, I don't know! See it in the Afrikaans section.

I have taken many photos of our Black-chested snake eagles, but have a look at the two photos in the Afrikaans section, of which I am very proud! It came out sharp and clear, showing the bird in all its pride, surveying "its" Estate!

When we added some more photos taken on our Estate (see website under Photographs – "... the journey continues") we placed some photos of the rhino beetle (*Dynastinae*, subfamily of the *Scarabaeidae* family). Their shiny skin makes them look as if they are wet! When I read up more about this mean looking bug, I was quite surprised at what I have learned about them. We see them mainly during summer months at night, attracted by the outside lights and they are really quite harmless to us, as they don't bite or sting.

More than 300 species of rhino beetles are known and they are among the largest of beetles. One of the species called the Hercules beetle, are known to lift up to 850 times their own weight – don't ask me how science boffins test these things, I am just relaying to you the interesting facts! To put this into perspective - if a human of average height and weight had the strength of the rhinoceros beetle, he would be able to lift a 65-ton object!

Their common names refer, of course, to the horns borne only by the males in most groups. The size of the horns are an indicator of the nutrition and physical health of the bug and is mainly used for fighting during breeding season and also for digging a quick getaway hole in the ground to escape from predators. They have two sets of wings, allowing it to fly. However the best protection they have from predators is their large size combined with being nocturnal. They avoid most of their predators by day, hiding invisibly under logs or amongst vegetation.

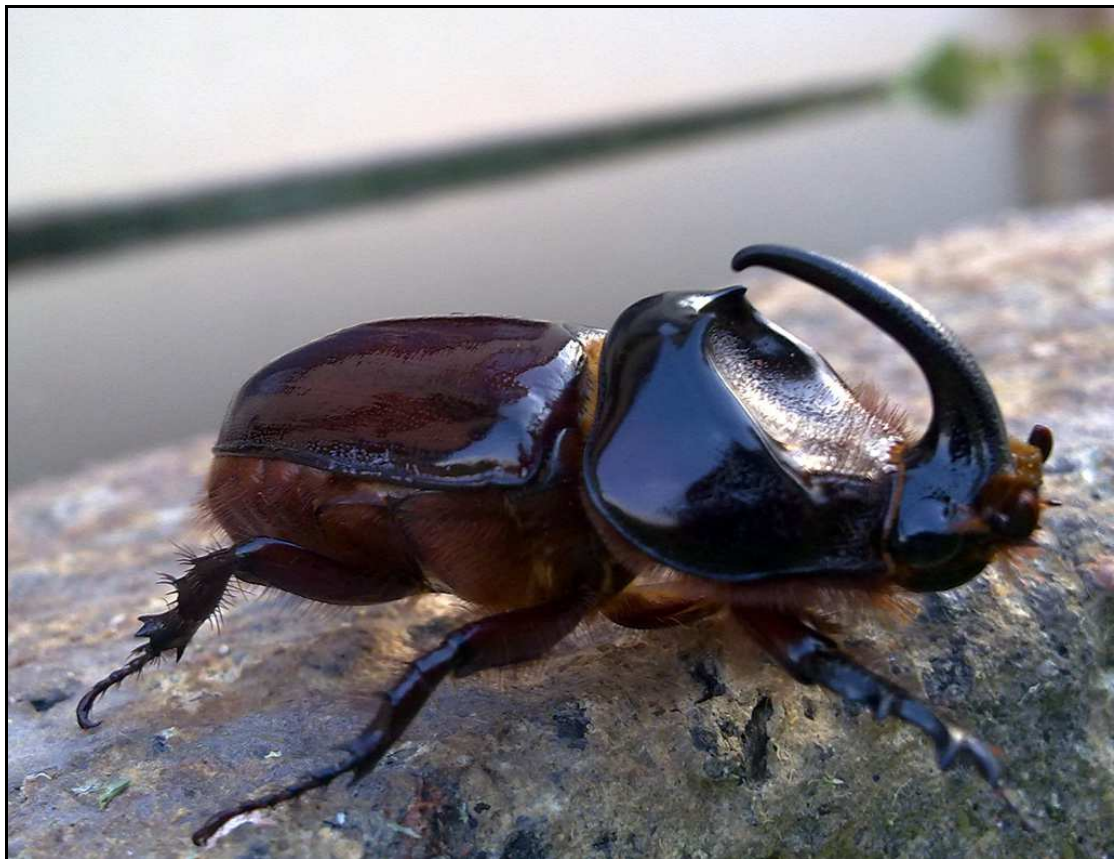
If disturbed, some can release very loud, hissing squeaks. Rubbing their abdomens against the ends of the wing covers creates this sound.

The adult male can live up to two years whilst the female rarely live long after mating. A female lays around fifty eggs on average – after a heavy session like that, no wonder she goes to rhino bug heaven! Larvae hatch from the eggs (this stage can last for several years) before turning into pupae and eventually into adults. Larvae live on rotten wood and also do very well in compost heaps. The adults live on nectar, plant sap and fruit. One would think, because of their size, the adults eat a lot - however they don't! The larvae are the gluttons and they apparently eat significant amounts of food (mostly rotten wood).

Rhino beetles are very popular as pets in Asia, because they are clean, easy to maintain and safe to handle! The males are also used to fight and large amounts of money are waged on the outcome of the fight. However, it is not cruel such as dog or cockfights - the one who first pushes the other off a branch determines the winner. Apparently female pheromones are used to get them into a fighting spirit.

A certain entomologist from Benin, West Africa - Severin Tchibozo, have done research and found that the larvae contains 40% more protein than chicken (which contains 20% protein) and beef (which contain 18% protein), suggesting they can become a major source of protein for expanding human populations. Anyone for some rhino beetle stir-fry? Not? How about some pasta with a rhino beetle topping then? Well, some people in our country enjoy dried mopani worms, so why not? Yours truly have been known to, (after a dare from my son, helped along by the courage from a glass of wine!) munch on a dry mopani worm at a school braai! All I can say is that I don't remember it tasting of much and the texture is what I suppose Vim (the scouring powder one sometimes uses at home) would be like if eaten!

Then there is a Dr MinJun Kim, an associate professor at Drexel University, who, together with his team of engineers, have done some research into the function and aerodynamics of the *Allomyrina dichotoma* (Japanese rhino beetle). They have found that this rhino beetle could play a big part in the next generation of aircraft design! I suppose to keep a body like that with the wings they have in the air, takes some doing. And you thought they are just these big, shiny garden bugs!



Lunchtimes find us stretching our legs in the garden from sitting behind a desk all day long. The butterflies and bees in my garden are very active at that time of the day, so, for some colour in this month's letter, I added a few photos of them. Let me tell you it's not easy! They do not sit and pose and wait for you to get the camera

ready – the moment you get the focus right, off they are to the next flower! More photos in the Afrikaans section.



**And just for fun, some insect jokes!**

**Q: How do bees brush their hair?**

**A: With a “honey comb”!**

**Q: What did one flea say to another?**

**A: "Should we walk or take the dog?"**

**What do you call a bug that can't have too much sugar?**

**A: A “diabeetle”!**

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Goeie dag weereens Celtis vriende!

Nog ‘n maand is verby en hier is ons in, wat veronderstel is, om die winterseisoen te wees! Ons is egter gelukkig om nog heerlike warm dae te hê met geen teken van oornag ryp nie. By die tyd wat my brief uitgaan kan dit natuurlik al verander het, maar tot tyd en wyl geniet ons die sonnige dae.

Meeste mense is nie te mal oor die winter nie – koue dae, vaal, kleurlose veld en dit lyk nie asof daar veel in die natuur gebeur nie. Maar kyk gerus om jou voor die veldbrande dinge verander. Die lieflike blou Hoëveldse lug wat menige skrywer en digter al inspireer het, die wind wat deur die blonde veldgras golf en natuurlik oral tussenin die klein helder vlammetjies van die aalwyne – elke seisoen het sy eie skoonheid mens moet dit net raaksien! Kyk na die mooi foto in die Engelse gedeelte van die kwêvoël vroegoggend teen die blou winterslug geneem!

Die ander lekkertes van die koue maande is natuurlik nie te versmaai nie. Dink maar aan varsgebakte, krakerige brood (die geur uit my kombuis van myne wat bak laat my mond al klaar water!) saam met dik tuisgemaakte sop, 'n glasië rooiwijn en 'n handvol biltong voor die kaggelvuur of warm sjokolade gedrink terwyl jy onder 'n warm kombers nestel – dis hierdie eenvoudige plesiertjies is wat maak dat mens die wintermaande waardeer.

Die aalwyne in ons veld is nou dalk nie die heel spoggerigste van die aalwyn spesies nie, maar hulle gee darem bietjie kleur in 'n andersins vaal veld en verskaf ook nektar aan sekere insekte en voëls, so mens kan hulle nie net negeer nie, hulle het hul plek in die natuur. Kyk die mooi foto wat ek geneem het tussen die goue grashalms – wie wil stry dat hulle iets is om na te kyk?



Ons het onlangs nog 'n blad op die webtuiste geskep met meer foto's van ons Estate (kyk bietjie onder Photographs "... the journey continues") en daar is onder meer foto's van die renoster tor (*Dynastinae*, subfamilie van die *Scarabaeidae* familie). Hierdie tor blink so, dis komplete asof hy pas uit die stort geklim het! My nuuskierigheid het, soos altyd, die oorhand gekry en is ek heel verbaas oor al die interessante dinge wat ek oor hul opgespoor het. Mens sien hul meestal in die somermaande naby stoepe of plekke waar buiteligte hul aangetrek het. Ten spyte van hul vreesaanjaende voorkoms is hul heeltewel onskadelik vir die mens en kan glad nie byt of steek nie.

Daar is sowat 300 verskillende spesies bekend. Een van die soorte, die sogenaamde Hercules tor, kan 850 keer sy eie gewig lig – moet my nou nie vra hoe die slimmes onder die goggaloë nou **daarby** uitgekom het nie – ek vertel julle net van die interessantheide wat ek nagelees het! Nou om dit bietjie in perspektief te kry – 'n

normale mens van normale gewig en lengte, sal, sou hy oor die krag van een van hierdie kêrels beskik, 'n voorwerp van 'n allemintige 65 ton gewig kan oplig!

Die renostertor se algemene naam verwys natuurlik na die horings aan die kop wat slegs by die manlike torre in meeste groepe voorkom. Die grootte van die horings hang glo ook af van die tor se algemene gesondheid asook die voedsaamheid van sy dieet. Hierdie horings word meestal as 'n wapen tydens paringtyd gebruik en ook om vinnig 'n gat te grou vir skuilplek. Die renostertor beskik ook oor twee pare vlerke wat hul in staat stel om te vlieg. Hul beste beskerming teen predatore is egter hul grootte tesame met die feit dat hul eintlik nagdiere is. Bedags vermy hulle hul vyande deur ongesiens onder houtstompe of tussen plante weg te kruip.

As een van hierdie menere versteur word, laat hulle 'n harde sissende piep geluid los. Hierdie geluide word gemaak deur hul maag teen die puntgedeeltes van hul vlerke te skuur.

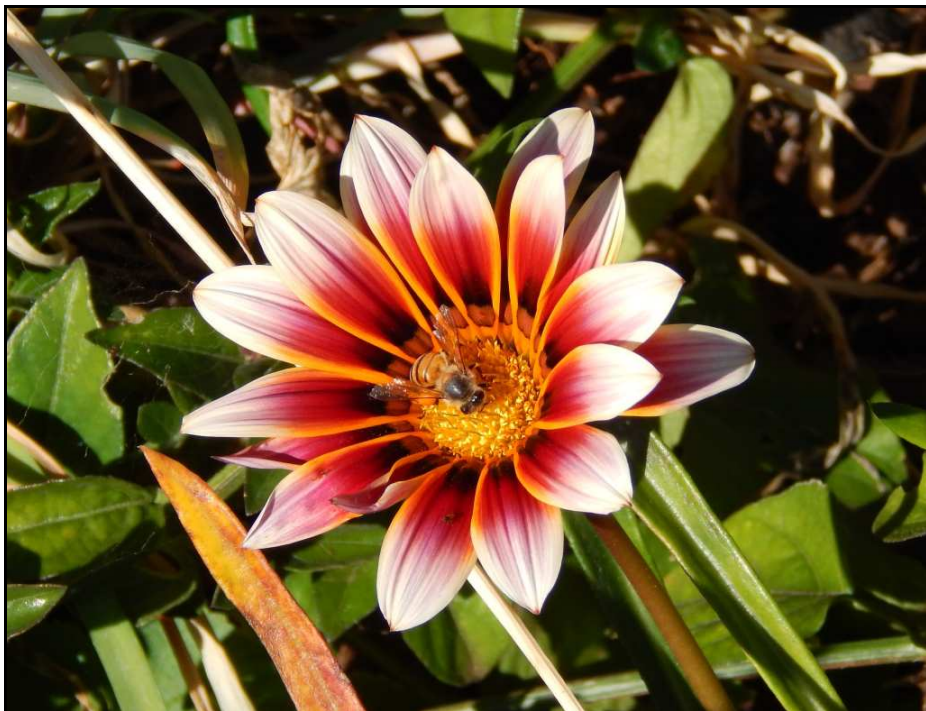
Navorsing wys dat die mannetjie tot twee jaar lank kan leef terwyl die wyfie meestal kort nadat sy eiers gelê het die gees gee. Wyfies lê ongeveer 50 eiers op 'n slag – g'n wonder hulle skop die emmer na so 'n sessie! Die larwes wat uitbroei se lewensduurte kan selfs 'n paar jaar lank duur waarna hulle in papies verander en uiteindelik daarna die volwasse tor soos ons dit ken. Die larwes eet verrotte hout en lewe ook alte lekker in komposhope. Die volwasse torre leef van nektar, plantsappe en vrugte. Mens sal nou dink, hul grootte in ag genome, dat die torre vreeslik baie eet maar blykbaar nie! Dis die larwes wat vraatsig is en groot hoeveelhede verrottende hout vreet.

Hierdie torre is baie populêr as troeteldiere in die Ooste aangesien hul skoon, maklik om te onderhou en veilig om te hanteer is! Die mannetjies word ook gebruik om te veg en groot bedrae geld word verwed. Dis darem blykbaar nie 'n wrede storie nie, niks soos honde of hoenderhaangevegte nie en die wenner is gewoonlik die een wat die ander een van 'n stuk tak afstoot – hul gebruik vroulike feromone om die mannetjies op te werk vir die stryd.

'n Sekere entomoloog van Benin in Wes Afrika, ene Severin Tchibozo het met navorsing bewys dat die proteïeninhoud van die larwes 40% hoër is as die van hoender (hoendervleis se proteïeninhoud is sowat 20%) en beesvleis wat se proteïeninhoud sowat 18% is. Sy bevindings stel voor dat die larwes 'n goeie bron van proteïen kan wees onder vir die altyd-groeiende menslike populasie. Nou wat van renostertorlarwe roerbraai? Nie lus vir dit vandag nie? Wat dan van pasta met 'n renostertorlarwe sousie? Daar is baie mense in ons land wat gedroogde mopaniewurms as 'n lekkerny en proteïenaanvulling eet, so hoekom nie? Die uwe is daarvoor bekend dat sy, na 'n uitdaging van my seun, en met behulp van 'n glasier wyn vir koerasie, "gesmul" het aan 'n gedroogde mopaniewurm by 'n skoolbraai funksie! Ek kan nie juis onthou dat dit na iets spesifiek gesmaak het nie en die tekstuur is, soos wat ek maar dink, die van Vim (die huishoudelike skuurmiddel wat mens soms gebruik) sal wees sou mens dit eet!

Dan is daar nog ene Dr MinJun Kim, medeprofessor by Drexel Universiteit, wat saam met 'n span ingenieurs navorsing gedoen het oor die aërodinamika van die *Allomyrina dichotoma* (Japanese renostertor). Hul bevindings is toe dat die renostertor 'n groot rol kan speel in die volgende generasie van lugvaartontwerp! Nou-ja, om so dik lyf in die lug te hou met die vlerke wat hulle het wil sekerlik gedoen wees! En julle het gedink hulle is net groot, blink tuingoggas! Kyk bietjie na die foto's in die Engelse gedeelte.

Middagetes is gewoonlik 'n kans om ons bene te strek na 'n lang oggend agter die lessenaar en dan is bye en skoenlappers baie aktief in ons tuin. Omdat daar nie veel kleur in die veld is nie, sluit ek sommer 'n paar mooi foto's van hulle in. En is dit nou nie 'n storie om hul afgeneem te kry nie – mens het skaars die fokus ingestel dan is hulle weg op pad na die volgende blom! Hulle sit beslis nie en mooi lyk tot jy eendag reg is vir hulle nie – dis ampers 'n vloekskoot as mens wel 'n goeie foto kry! Kyk by die Engelse afdeling vir meer foto's.



**Sommer vir die grap: Wat is erger as 'n kameelperd met nekpyn? 'n Duisendpoot met atleetsvoet!**



Voor ek groet, nog foto's van ons swartborsslangarend – ek het al heelwat foto's geneem die afgelope tyd, maar op hierdie twee is ek baie trots! Dis mooi en skerp en wys hoe trots die pragvoël “sy” Estate sit en beskou!





Al wat dus oorbly is om almal 'n sonnige maand toe te wens, tot ons volgende keer weer gesels.

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

