

Celtis africana

Sterkfontein Country Estates

July/Julie 2014

Good day Celtis friends and country folk!

It's July, it's winter, and the veld seems devoid of colour except for some bright patches of aloes, yet, there is still beauty around us! The bare branches of trees are sculptures against the blue wintry sky. Sunrises and sunsets always make me grab my camera to try and capture the beauty and openness.



Winter Trees (Photo: Elmarie Krige, 2014)

Winter is also a time when we see a lot of birds coming to our house for extra food, as nourishment is becoming fairly scarce in nature. One of the popular food sources is the beautiful *Aloe marlothii* in our garden. This aloe certainly is spectacular at this time of the year. It is very hardy and I read somewhere that the dried leaves are used as snuff! Anyone with a blocked nose? Oops, I forgot - I first have to dry some leaves, but maybe next winter...!

Interestingly enough, it is not just the nectar-eating birds coming for a sweet sip, but the Black-collared barbets (*Lybius torquatus*) also join in on the fun. Although it does not have the long beak necessary to reach deep into the flowers, it actually tears some of the flowers off and then gets to the sweet stuff! To think that I ration myself

very strictly with fruit every day so I can spoil the fruit-eating birds with a variety of munchies - yet for Mr and Mrs Barbet it is apparently not enough – they want pudding after their meal as well! Having a sweet tooth myself, I can understand this, though! On the photos below, they are joined by weavers who are seed-eating birds, yet they obviously **also** discovered the joys of something sweet!



Weaver and Black-collared Barbet (Photos: Garfield Krige, 2014)

The black-collared barbet is quite an interesting bird! They are one of the many duetting species in the *Lybius* genus and there are apparently no solitary song instances heard by this species. Their song is easily recognised by the “*too-doodle-too-doodle*”- sound, accompanied by the flicking of wings. Usually a pair faces each other when calling, leaning forward and bowing to each other “ceremoniously”. They also have a nasal warning sound and a loud buzzing call.

Their song is antiphonal, which, in layman’s terms, simply means that their song is sequential. In other words one of a pair will sing the first note, followed by second different note sung by the other bird in a pair! It may not sound like two birds singing to you and I, but the notes of a pair do differ. They do not sing simultaneously but are synchronized in their duets and the time lapsed between one note from the male and the next note from the female (called auditory response time) is a staggering 178 milliseconds! Now that is interesting!

The black-collared barbet also use a lot of wing and flight display in their greeting and mating ceremonies and territorial displays. They also act in groups when driving off intruders.

These plump-looking birds have rather large heads and are larger, and more intensely coloured than other barbets. There is also no visible difference between the appearance of the male and female bird. They mainly feed on fruit and vegetables but have been observed to feed on centipedes, lizards, frogs, geckos and insects, although this does not occur as often. Well, I can now add, from my own observation and photos, they love nectar too!

As far as nesting is concerned – it is excavated by both sexes, and consists of a hole in the underside of a dead branch of softwood trees like the wild fig. It often uses the same nesting hole repeatedly, sometimes for ten years! They lay 2-5 eggs, incubated by both parents for about 18 days. The chicks are fed fruit and insects by both parents and leave the nest after between 33 - 36 days.

Another new resident on our Estate is the Red-throated Wryneck (*Jynx ruficollis*). A couple of weeks ago we kept hearing a new birdcall but were just not able to locate the owner of the sound. However, one day we saw the little bird, Garfield got his camera at the ready and took a photo and we identified it as the Red-throated Wryneck.

This little bird is not easy to photograph, as it tends to disappear the moment you take aim! A couple of days later he got a few other shots of the bird. This little bird is a species of wryneck and believe it or not, in the woodpecker family. However, it cannot climb nor peck like a woodpecker does.



Red-throated Wryneck (Photo: Garfield Krige, 2014)

The wryneck is highly specialized, living only in grassland areas and feeding exclusively on ants and termites. It usually nests in tree cavities made by other birds, but also use natural tree holes or even hollow metal fence posts as nests. It usually lays 3-4 eggs, which are incubated by both sexes for about 13 days. Both parents care for the chicks, which stay in the nest for about 26 days, becoming independent shortly thereafter.

The wryneck has a long tongue can extend more than 60 mm past the tip of its bill and it is covered with a sticky mucus secretion from the salivary glands. This helps in the mopping up of large numbers of ants, their eggs and pupae as well as termites. The tongue is flicked out at an amazing speed to gather large beakfuls of prey to deliver to hungry chicks!



"I got the biggest piece!" (Photo: Elmarie Krige, 2014)

Five pm is feeding frenzy time in our backyard. This is the time I feed my dogs and the birds get some bread as a late afternoon snack. However, if I am not out with bread by ten past five the crowned lapwings (plovers) get in a state of hysteria and start screeching abuse at the top of their lungs outside the courtyard gate! They sometimes are almost right at the backdoor. This is a year-round story for the lapwings, weavers and sparrows, but at this time of the year they are joined by the thick-knees. They come running at great speed, greedily grabbing the biggest chunks of bread. Then they run off to a little distance, to literally gulp it down. We are often surprised they don't choke!

Lately, a blacksmith lapwing has become interested in the goings-on as well. In past years it would hover around the edges of the action but now it has decided to join in

the fun! It is the smallest of the lapwings and quite a bit smaller than the thick-knees, yet it is as cheeky as anything; chasing everyone away with spread wings and lots of loud protestations. Amazingly, they all give way - waiting for it to turn its back when they quickly dash closer to snatch a few more beakfuls! Great fun for us to watch!

By the way – do you know how the blacksmith lapwing got its name? Apparently the vernacular name is derived from the repeated metallic 'tink, tink, tink' alarm call, which suggests the sound of a blacksmith's hammer striking an anvil!

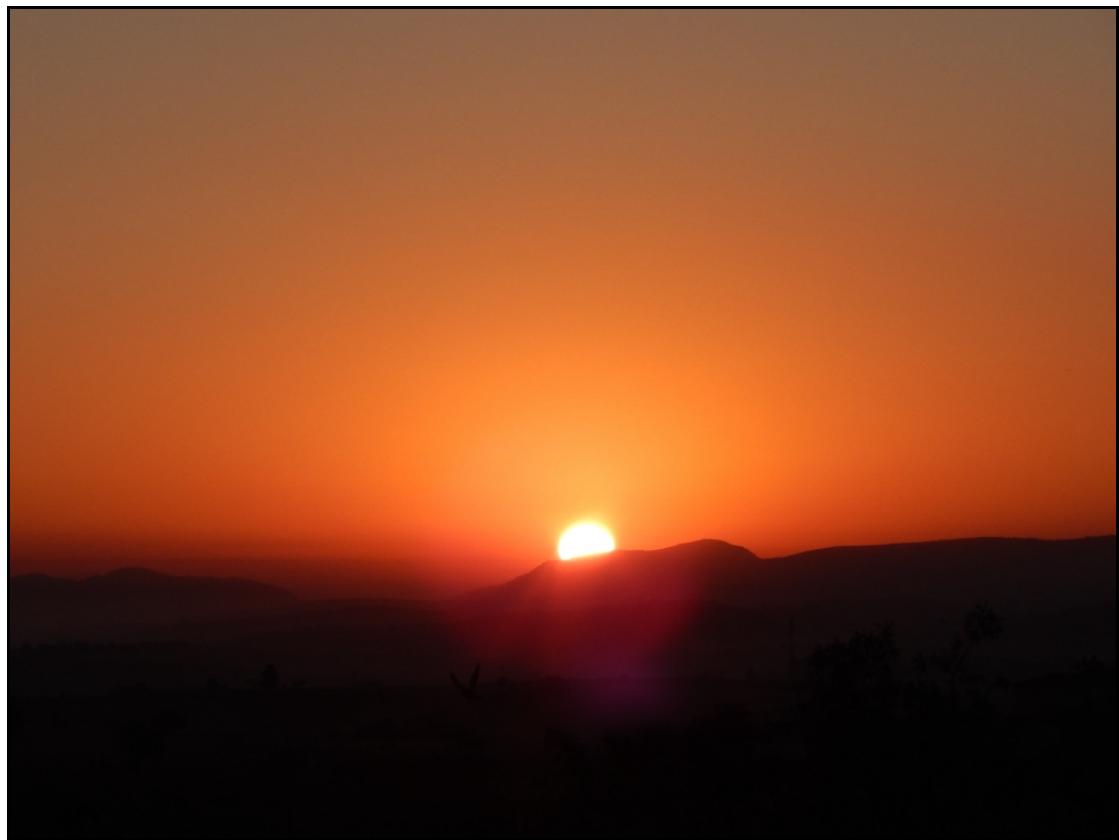
(Sources: Roberts Voëlgids – Chittenden.H; Sasol birds of Southern Africa – Sinclair.I)

Q: What birds spend all their time on their knees?

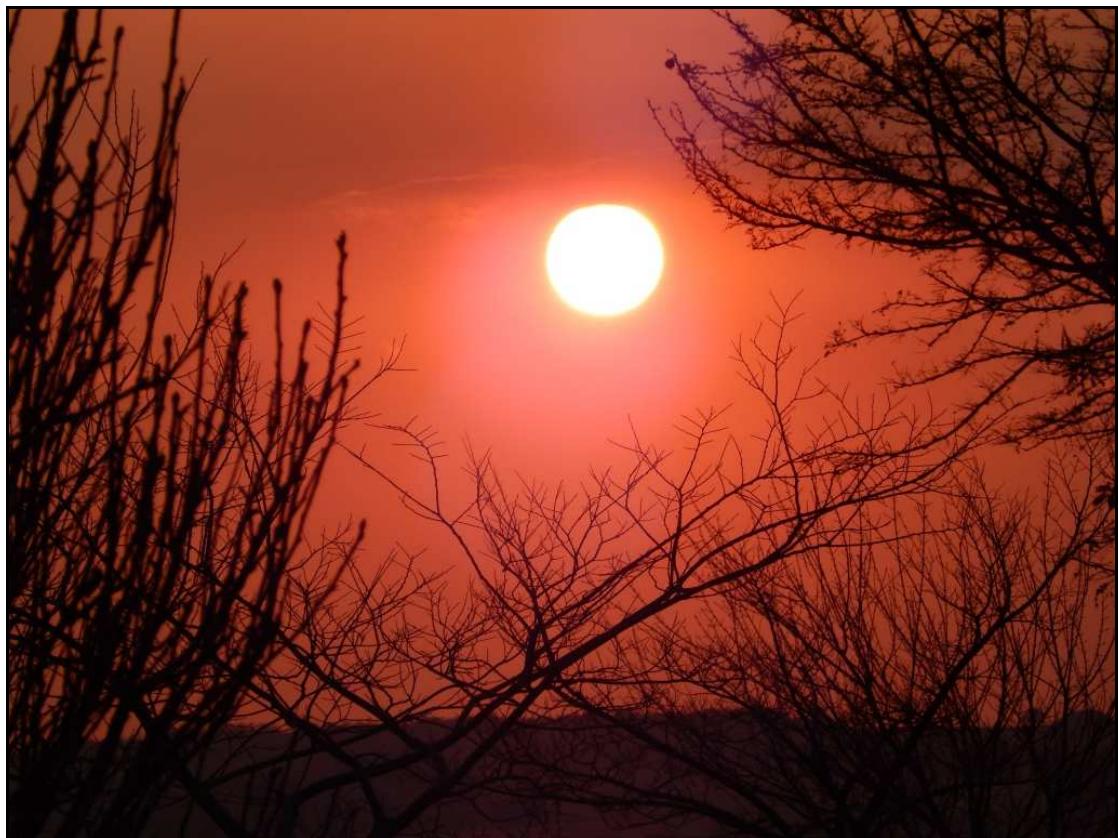
A: Birds of prey!

Q: What did they call the canary that flew into the pastry dish?

A: Tweetie Pie!



Sunrise over Zwartkop / Sonsopkoms oor Zwartkop (Photo: Elmarie Krige, 2014)



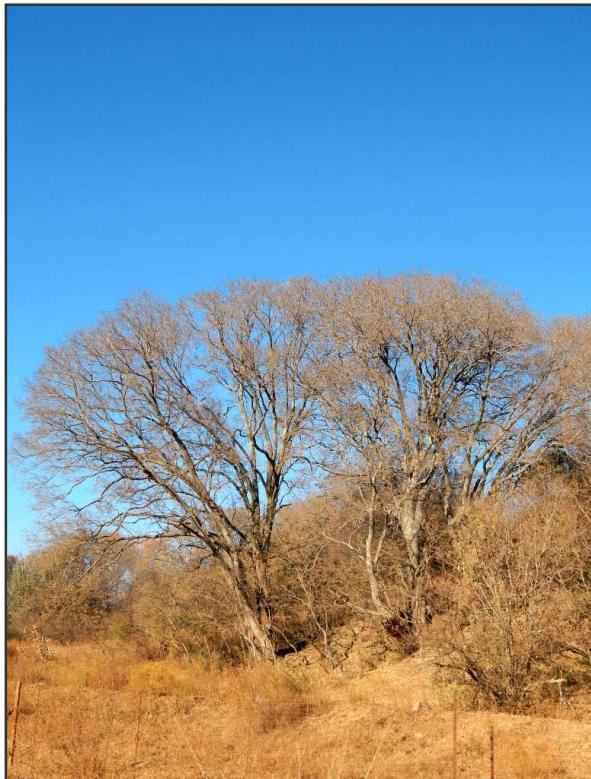
Sunset/Sonsondergang (Photo: Elmarie Krige, 2014)

Goeie dag weereens my Celtis- en Sterkfontein-vriende!

Julie is gewoonlik koud en behalwe vir die kleurspatsels van aalwyne, is die veld maar vaal en amper kleurloos en tog, kyk maar bietjie om jou, daar is altyd iets moois te siene! Die kaal winterbome is natuurlike beeldhouwerke teen die blou winterslug en die sonsopkoms en sonsondergange laat my gereeld na my kamera gryp!

Winter is natuurlik ook 'n tyd wat mens baie soorte voëlspesies raaksien. Kos raak skaars in die wild en hulle kom graag na tuine vir ekstra happies. In ons tuin is die *Aloe marlothii* die tyd van die jaar baie aanskoulik met sy uitgestrekte "arms" vol kleur en dis baie gewild vir nektar onder die voëls.

Ek lees nou die dag die gedroogde blare van hierdie baie geharde aalwyn word as snuif gebruik – as daar een



van julle met 'n toe neus sukkel, ek het die regte doepa! Maar o wag, ek vergeet - die blare moet mos gedroog word, so gee kans, dalk volgende winter!

Interessant genoeg het ons opgemerk dis nie net die nektaretende voëls wat graag iets soets kom geniet nie, die rooikophoutkappers (*Lybius torquatus*) het nou al paar maal hul soethappies kom kry! Natuurlik beskik hulle nie oor 'n lekker lang snauel wat nodig is om die nektar by te kom nie, so hulle het plangemaak en letterlik die blomme uitgepluk om by die lekkerte te kan uitkom!



Rooikophoutkapper geniet 'n slukkie nektar (foto: Garfield Krige, 2014)

En hier rantsoeneer ek myself elke oggend met vrugte, net sodat ek die voëls die tyd van die jaar kan bederf met verskeidenheid van vrugte! Vir meneer en mevrou houtkapper is dit egter nie genoeg nie – nee hulle soek bietjie poeding na die maaltyd ook! Siende ek self 'n soet tand het, verstaan ek dit nogals. Op die foto is 'n vink (wat eintlik 'n saadvreter is!) wat agtergekom het hier is iets lekkers, besig om ook saam te smul!

Die rooikophoutkapper is 'n heel interessante voël. Hulle is deel van verskeie "tweesang" spesies in die *Lybius* genus. Alhoewel hul roep vir my en jou klink asof dit deur 'n enkele voël gemaak word, is daar geen alleensang deur hierdie voëls nie. Die "too-doodle-too-doo" klank, gepaardgaande met vlerkgeklap is maklik uitkenbaar maar word altyd deur 'n paar gesing! 'n Paar sal gesig na mekaar sit en vooroor leun en 'n tipe "seremoniële" buiging na mekaar maak terwyl die klank voortgebring word. Hulle maak ook 'n nasale waarskuwingsklank sowel as 'n harde gonsende geluid.

Die rooikophoutkapper se geluid is antifonaal, oftewel bestaan uit beurtsang. Dit beteken maar net die mannetjie sal die eerste noot sing en die tweede, andersklinkende noot, word deur die wyfie gesing – dit mag vir ons soos een voël klink maar dit is nie. Hulle sing nie saam nie, die klanke verskil wel van mannetjie tot wyfie en hul tweesang is so gesinkroniseerd dat die tydsverloop tussen twee note 'n yslike 178 millisekondes is! Geen wonder dit klink of dit een voël is wat elke noot sing nie! Hierdie houtkapper gebruik ook heelwat vlerk- en vlugvertoon gedurende hul parings en groet ceremonies asook gebiedsafbakening. Indringers word deur groepe voëls verjaag.

Die rooikophoutkapper het 'n plomp lyf en groot kop en hulle is groter en helderder van kleur as ander voëls in die familie, en daar is ook nie enige visuele verskille tussen die mannetjies en wyfies nie. Rooikophoutkappers is hoofsaaklik vrugtevreters (asook groente) maar dit is al opgemerk dat hulle insekte, soms kleinerige paddas, geitjies, akkedissies asook duisendpote vreet, hoewel dit nie hul hoofdieet vorm nie. Wel, ek kan nou byvoeg dat hulle nektar ook geniet en het foto's om dit te bewys!

Neste word deur beide geslagte gebou en is gewoonlik 'n gat aan die onderkant van 'n dooie sagtehout tak soos byvoorbeeld die wildevy. Hulle gebruik oor en oor dieselfde nes, soms tot tien jaar lank. Twee – vyf eiers word gewoonlik gelê en beide die ouers help met die uitbroei wat sowat agtien dae neem. Die kuikens word ook deur beide die ouers gevoer en bestaan uit vrugte en insekte en die nes word gewoonlik verlaat na om-en-by 33-36 dae.

Nog 'n nuwe bewoner van ons Estate is die Draaihals (*Jynx ruficollis*). Die afgelope paar weke het ons 'n nuwe voëlroep bly hoor, maar kon net nie die oorsprong van die geluid mooi sien nie. Die voëltjie is so vinnig om tussen takke te verdwyn, maar toe een dag het Garfield sy kamera betyds byderhand gehad en 'n foto of twee kon neem. Ons het dit toe as die Draaihals geïdentifiseer. 'n Paar dae later kon hy nog foto's van die voëltjie kry. Hierdie voël is deel van die Speg spesies en val in die houtkappervamilie – glo dit of nie! Die draaihals kan egter nie klim soos ander houtkappers nie en kan ook nie gate met hul bekke kap nie.

Hierdie hoogs gespesialiseerde voël leef uitsluitlik van miere, hul eiers en papies asook termiete. Hul habitat is uitsluitlik grasland en hul neste is in gewoonlik in gate wat deur ander houtkappers gemaak is, of in natuurlik boomholtes en soms in die holtes van die metaalpale van omheiningsdraad. Tussen 3 en 4 eiers word gewoonlik gelê wat deur beide die ouerpaar bebroei word. Die kuikens broei na sowat dertien dae uit en beide ouers sorg vir die kleintjies wat na omtrent 26 dae die nes begin verlaat en kort daarna onafhanklik raak.



Draaihals (foto: Garfield Krige, 2014)

Nou hierdie outjie het 'n lang tong – dit kan 'n ongelooflike 60 mm by die bek uitsteek! Dis bedek met 'n taaierige afskeiding wat van die spoegkliere afkom. Dit maak dit maklik om 'n hele spul miere, hul eiers en papies, of dan termiete, sommer in een lek uit hul gate te kry. Die tong word ook blitsnel uitgesteek en bekkevol prooi word so dan vinnig na die honger kuikens geneem!

Hierdie spesie het die gewoonte om vooroor te leun en die kop van kant tot kant te swaai. Hierdie manier van vertoon word vir gebiedsafbakening en hofmakery gebruik- vandaar ook dan die naam draaihals!

Laatmiddag is dit 'n hele storie met die voëls. So by vyfuur is dit tyd om my honde kos te gee en die kiewiete, mossies en vinke soek dan 'n laaste happie brood voor slapenstyd. Die kroonkiewiete sal, as ek net 'n paar minute later as gewoonlik is, met skril stemme by die binneplaas kom protesteer en soms tot reg voor die agterdeur kom skree! Hierdie tyd van jaar is daar altyd 'n paar dikkoppe wat ook hulle deel van die brood kom eis. Met lang hale kom hul aangedraf en gryp die grootste stukke brood wat daar is. Dan hol hul eers 'n entjie weg waar dit vinnig afgewurg word – ons was al benoud dat hulle sal verstik in hul vraatsigheid!

Die bontkiewiet het in al die jare nie huis deelgeneem aan die storie nie, maar skielik, die jaar, het hulle besluit daar word op hul gebied oortree en as daar te ete is sal hulle dit doen. Hulle is die kleinste van die kiewiete en heelwat kleiner as die dikkoppe, maar met groot bravade word alles en almal met wyd gespreide vlerke en luidkeelse protestasies verwilder. En snaaks genoeg gee almal pad – maar sodra hy die rug draai, dan word daar weer vinnig nadergestorm vir nog ‘n happie! Vir ons is dit ‘n hele sirkus elke dag.

Die Engelse naam vir bontkiewiete is die “blacksmith lapwing”. Die naam is glo verkry omdat hul “tienk-tienk-tienk” waarskuwingsklanke herinner aan ystersmede se hamerslae teen ‘n aambeeld! Interessant né!

(Bronne: Roberts Voëlgids – Chittenden. H; Sasol Birds of Southern Africa – Sinclair. I)

**Wat is die verskil tussen ‘n voël en ‘n vlieg?
‘n Voël kan vlieg maar ‘n vlieg kan nie voël nie!**

As ‘n haan bo-op die nok van die dak ‘n eier sou lê – watter kant toe sou die eier afrol? Hane lê nie eiers nie!

Vir nou groet ek tot ons volgende maand weer gesels. Geniet ons Estate en alles wat hier voorkom!

