

Celtis africana

Sterkfontein Country Estates

August/Augustus 2014

Good day once again to all the Celtis friends!

This month, a year ago I sent out the very first Celtis letter! Sometimes it feels like yesterday the first one went out, other times it feels like ages ago. Things have changed somewhat since then, instead of doing a separate covering letter; I put most everything in the Celtis letter itself.

The whole thing started by my wishing to start a website to record all the interesting floral species of the Estate. This was especially once we won the battle against Eskom who wanted to put high-voltage pylons right in front of our Estate and thus not only spoiling the view but also downgrading the value of our properties. The fact that we had a floral study done and could prove that rare and/or endangered species like the Harveya exists here, certainly helped our case at the time. So, I was hoping not to just create an awareness of what we have here, but also to leave some sort of recorded legacy.

All over the world many species disappear forever – often by the thoughtless action of mankind, so for me it was important to try and record what exactly occurs in our area. I thought of starting off with the Celtis letter to introduce things in a less formal way and slowly add things to the website itself. Of course once I started gathering information, I realised there are so many other interesting animals and insects that also need to be recorded and from there on it really snowballed! But I am very proud of our website and keep getting lots of positive and complimentary feedback about it, so it is all worth the effort.

At the end of the letter I am including a few photos sent by some of you over time; it is always nice when people participate in something concerning the Estate.

We had a fairly mild winter until a couple of weeks ago when we had absolutely freezing weather – my poor garden suffered a lot. What I find very interesting on my early walks on our property, is that you can see actual “paths” that the frost “fell” on the ground. There would be a whole area covered in frost and then a portion that did not get any frost at all with no visible damage to any plants, and then next to that another section that got hit severely!

An interesting plant that withstood the cold and proudly bore flowers is the *Kalanchoe thyrsiflora*. This plant is also known as the paddle plant, or flapjacks and I can see why. The flat rounded leaves remind one very much of paddles or flapjacks – I love it when they give plants descriptive names like that! The large, rounded, fleshy leaves are greyish-green with red margins and the flowers are yellow on long, slender, upright stalks.

The genus *Kalenchoe* occurs throughout Africa, Madagascar, Cyprus, Indochina and Malaysia, but this particular species of the *Kalenchoe*, is native to South Africa. It occurs in the veld on our property, and is lovely when planted on a rockery or even in a pot. It needs very little attention as it thrives in dry conditions and the flowers have the most amazingly sweet smell. It usually only start bearing flowers after two years and produces seed yet another year later.

The Afrikaans name of “meelplakkie” is very appropriate as it looks like the plant is liberally dusted with flour (“meel”). Over years this plant has adapted to survive in very harsh conditions. Apart from the leaves being succulence, the way the leaves grow - always erectly pointing upward toward the sun, helps to minimise exposure to the heat and in doing so, helping it conserve moisture even more. It has also adapted by employing grey green leaves to stay cool. The white floury coating on the leaves and flowers reflects the sun and also assists in keeping it cool – the same as when one wears a white t-shirt to keep cool instead of a black t-shirt on a hot day!

The Sothos use it as a charm to “ease difficulties”!



Kalenchoe thrysiflora – Close-up of the flower in the Afrikaans section (Photos Garfield Krige)

News on our eagles.

First the bad news: unfortunately due to the sudden freezing conditions, it seems that our chick did not survive. We think it might be a combination of the sudden cold and not enough food – but it is speculation on our part. I took a photo on 09 April of the nest building (see Celtis letter of May 2014) and about a week later, Peter Botha reported seeing the two mating on his property. At a guess the egg may have been laid any time around late April – although one cannot be sure of the exact date. The egg takes 51-52 days to hatch, so at a guess around late June – it all depends on exactly when the egg was laid and no one knows!

The heavy frost and cold was over 6,7and 8 July when the chick was at its most vulnerable. For the first 25 days of its life, both parents look after it intensely and if they could not find food immediately and were off hunting, of course it would have been very vulnerable to the icy weather if left alone in the open, unprotected nest. Remember that the chick only becomes fully-fledged and ready to leave the nest after three months of age. That is the only conclusion we could come to, as we did not see any action or life at the nest around then.

The good news is that same week, around the Friday, we noticed them bringing nesting material to the old nest! Hallelujah, we were so happy! I then took a photo of them mating on 21 July, so let us hope for a healthy, happy chick to be hatched this time. It is not the best of photos, but I try not to stand around too long near them. I see them all the time on or around the nest and just hope there is plentiful food around and that all works out for the best this time around. If you see them, try not to stop for long periods of time, as they do get agitated when this happens and fly off.



Black-chested Snake eagles mating (*Photo Elmarie Krige, 21 July 2014*)

We recently bought suet balls for the garden birds and boy, do they enjoy it! At first they were a bit weary of these big, white, round things and approached with caution, but as always it takes one brave one to try it out and the rest will follow very quickly! The sparrows, weavers, black-collared barbets, starlings, bishops – you name it, they LOVE it! And of course the fruit I put out is a huge big treat. Look at the Speckled Mouse birds – they literally hold the fruit pieces in their claws while munching away!



Black-collared Barbet enjoying the suet ball (Photo Garfield Krige)

Something else our feathered friends really adore is the birdbaths all over in our garden. Even on the coldest days when everyone else is looking for the best sunny spot, they are having a ball and splash about as if it is a hot day in December! Look at the ball the Pied Starlings are having!



Pied starlings splashing about (Photo Garfield Krige)



Speckled mousebirds feasting on the fruit – notice how they hold the fruit in their “hands” (Photo Garfield Krige)

Just for fun:

A man buys a parrot but discovers too late that it is extremely foul-mouthed and bad-tempered. The bird keeps shouting obscenities at the man, who is forced to lock it in his garden shed to try to shut it up. This doesn't work and he can still hear the filthy-mouthed bird from the house. In desperation the man retrieves the parrot and

shuts it in a cupboard, but the bird still keeps screaming at him, and now the neighbours are starting to complain about the noise. As a last resort the man shoves the parrot into the fridge. Miraculously, the parrot suddenly shuts up, so the man takes the bird out of the fridge and puts it back on its perch. The parrot then apologises for its appalling behaviour and asks to be forgiven. ‘That’s okay,’ says the man. ‘As long as you don’t do it again.’ ‘I won’t,’ says the parrot, casting a nervous eye at the fridge. ‘By the way... what did the chicken do wrong?’

Thanks again to one and all for your lovely letters; a particularly nice one was from Dehan Liebenberg. Although a landowner for over ten years, they have not yet settled on their property, but thanks to the Celtis letter, they have been inspired to look with fresh eyes to all the plants and animals on the Estate. If the Celtis inspires someone else to be as passionate about our Estate as we are, then it is worth the effort! And as this is a special “anniversary” letter, allow me to be a bit of indulgence to also thank my ever-loving husband for his encouragement and patience and especially his help in always trying to select the best photo out of the literally thousands we have, for inclusion in the letter and the website! Thanks also to my daughter, Alicia for her encouragement and that she always thinks my Celtis letters are very cool!

All the best to all of you till next month when hopefully the weather is a bit warmer!

Dagsê al my Celtis vriende!

Hierdie maand is dit al een jaar sedert ek die eerste Celtis brief uitgestuur het! Soms voel dit soos gister, ander kere voel dit weer of ek dit al jare lank doen! Dinge het intussen bietjie verander en waar ek voorheen ‘n dekbrief gedoen het, sit ek nou sommer alles in die Celtis brief.

Die hele ding het begin na ons “geveg” met Eskom wat hoogspanningsdrade en ‘n substasie reg voor ons Estate wou oprig, wat ‘n daling in ons eiendomswaarde tot gevolg sou hê, om nie van die verlies van ons mooi uitsig te praat nie. Ek het besef, na ons plantstudies laat doen het waarin ons kon bewys hier kom rooi data en skaars plantsoorte soos bv die Harveyas voor, dat daar êrens ‘n tipe van rekord gehou behoort te word van al ons mooi flora. So dit was nie net om almal bewus te maak van wat alles hier voorkom nie maar ook om te sorg vir’n soort nalatenskap.

Wêreldwyd verdwyn spesies op ‘n gereelde grondslag – meestal deur die ondeurdagte optrede van die mens, so dit was vir my regtig ‘n tipe roeping om, ten minste in ons klein area, darem op ‘n manier inligting te stoor van wat hier voorkom. Ek het dus met die Celtis brief begin om op ‘n soort van informele manier hopelik jul almal te laat rondkyk in die natuur en trots te wees op wat ons het.

Intussen het die ratte in my kop oortyd gewerk met idees vir die webwerf en toe ek eers besef hoe baie ander interessante diere en insekte en ander dinge hier

voorkom, het idees behoorlik gesneeubal. Maar ja, ek is trots op hoe dit groei, al is dit stadig, die data is daar en moet net geplaas word, maar alles neem tyd. Intussen kry ek die mooiste briewe van oraloor van mense wat ons webwerf geniet en dit maak dit alles die moeite werd.

Aan die einde van die brief is 'n paar van julle eie foto's wat oor tyd aan my gestuur is – dis altyd lekker as jul belangstel en bydra, so dankie daarvoor!

Na 'n uitgerekte somer slaan die winter toe skielik met mening toe hier by die 6e Julie rond! My arme tuin het 'n knou gekry maar wat - kom lente, kom groen! Dis altyd vir my interessant as ek vroegmôre op ons grond rondstap om te sien hoe snaaks die ryp geval het. Daar sal 'n breë strook spierwit onder die ryp lê en dan skielik 'n stuk waar niks geval het en net langs dit weer 'n stuk wat 'n duidelik klap van die ryp weghet!

'n Interessante plant waaraan die ryp en koue geen verskil kon maak en ewe nonchalant haar blomme ten toon gestel het te midde van die ysige weer, is die *Kalenchoe thrysiflora*. In Afrikaans is dit ook bekend as die geelplakkie of die meelplakkie of net die plakkie. Die naam meelplakkie is heel beskrywend want die hele plant is bedek met 'n laag wit, meelagtige stof. Die groot ronde, vlesige blare is grysgroen met 'n rooi randjie en die geel blommetjies word op 'n langerige regop steel gedra.



Nabyskoot van die *Kalenchoe thrysiflora* blom (Foto Garfield Krige)

Die genus *Kalenchoe* kom oral in Afrika, Madagaskar, Siprus Indo-Sjina en Maleisië voor, maar hierdie spesifieke spesie is inheems aan Suid Afrika. Op ons eiendom kom dit wild voor in die veld, maar mens kan dit in 'n rotstuin of selfs pot plant. Dit

het min aandag nodig en doen goed in droë omstandighede en die blommetjies het die lieflikste sagte soet geur. As dit in 'n tuin of pot geplant word dra dit gewoonlik eers na twee jaar blomme en neem 'n verdere jaar voordat dit saad maak.

Oor die jare het hierdie plant verander om by uiterste omstandighede aan te pas. Behalwe vir die vlesige blare wat so vog stoor, groei die blare ook altyd in 'n opwaartse wyse reg na die son, om so blootstelling aan hitte te verminder en dus nog meer vog kan help bewaar. Die grysgroen blare is 'n ander slim manier van die plant om teen hitte bestand te wees. Die wit poeieragtige stof waarmee die hele plant bedek is, reflektereer ook die son se hitte weg van die plant en hou dit sodoende ook koel – net soos 'n wit t-hemp op 'n warm dag jou baie koeler hou as wanneer jy 'n donkerkleurige of swart t-hemp sou dra!

Die Sotho's gebruik hierdie plant as 'n tipe "gelukbringer" om hul van moeilikhede te vrywaar!

Nuus oor ons arende.

Die slechte nuus is dat die jongste kuiken dit blykbaar nie gemaak het nie. Ons dink maar dat dit 'n kombinasie van die ysige weer tesame met die ouers wat moontlik met lang tye weg was op soek na kos was, wat die oorsaak was. Op 09 April het ek nog foto's geneem waar hul besig was met nesbou (kyk die foto's by Meimaand se Celtis brief). Ongeveer 'n week later het Peter Botha laat weet dat hy hul sien paar het.

Die eier kon moontlik enige tyd laat April gelê wees, maar niemand kan met sekerheid sê nie. Die eier broei na sowat 51-52 dae uit, dus, as ek 'n raaiskoot moet waag, so einde Junie se kant. Dus was die kuiken op sy mees kwesbaarste toe ons die erg koue en ryp hier rondom 6-8 Julie gekry het. Hy sou nog nie al sy vere gehad het en om die koue in 'n oop nes te trotseer veral as die ouers dalk lank weg was om kos te probeer kry.

Die eerste 25 dae van die kuiken se lewe is wanneer beide ouers intensief na hom omsien wat kos en so aan betrek en mens kan dus maar net spekuleer dat die skielike koue en min kos te veel was. Onthou die kuiken is eers ten volle geveerd op ouderdom van drie maande, waarna dit gereed is om die nes te verlaat. Daar kon ook ander redes voor wees, want, soos ek noem is dit slegs spekulasié van my kant af.

Maar wat, soos die natuur is het hulle nie opgegee en die goeie nuus is 'n week nadat ons bemerk het die ouers is glad nie meer in die nes se omgewing is nie, het ons die Vrydag gesien dat hulle besig is om nesmateriaal na die ou nes te bring. Halleluja – was ons nou bly!

Op 21 Julie het ek die twee afgeneem waar hul besig was om te paar en sedertdien sien ek hul heeltyd in die omgewing van, of op die nes. Ek probeer maar soms 'n vinnige foto steel want ek wil hul so min moontlik pla. Ek hoop maar almal sal nie

met lang tye daar stop en staar nie, hulle hou nie daarvan en vlieg sommer gou weg. Of hul wel al 'n eier gelê het weet mens nie. Soms is die wyfie lang rukke op die nes maar die afgelope paar dae weer nie heeltyd nie. Ons hoop regtig hierdie keer sal hulle 'n gesonde kuiken grootmaak!

'n Ruk gelede het ons vetballe vir die tuinvoëls gekoop en geniet hulle dit omtrent! Die eerste paar dae was hulle bietjie versigtig vir die groot, wit ronde goed, maar natuurlik neem dit net een voorbok om te proe en dan volg die res! Dis rooikophoutkappers en mossies; vinke en spreeus – die hele lot sak behoorlik toe op dit en natuurlik hou dit nie baie lank nie, maar dis lekker om hul dop te hou. Natuurlik is die vrugte wat ek elke dag uitsit ook 'n groot bederf – kyk hoe die muisvoëls stukke vrugte in hul pote vashou en skewekop daaraan smul!



Rooivlerkspreeus geniet die vetballe (Foto Elmarie Krige)

Iets anders wat die geveerde volkies ook oor mal is, is al die voëlbadjies oral in ons tuin. Dit kan *hoe* koud wees en op die dae wat mens bibberend 'n lekker sonkol opsoek, sal hulle die water aandurf en bad dat die water spat. Kyk bietjie die foto's waar die witgatspreeus te heerlik speel.



Witgatspreeus wat bad (foto Garfield Krige)



Gevlekte Muisvoëls – kyk hoe hou hulle die vrugte in hulle “hande” vas (foto Garfield Krige)

Net vir die grap:

Met al die nuwe tegnologie en ontwikkelings en dinge is dit moontlik vir ‘n vrou om op hoë ouderdom nog geboorte te kan gee. Toe die 80-jarige tante dus uit die

kraaminrigting ontslaan word, is die familie dan ook binne 'n dag daar om hierdie wonderwerk te aanskou. Na hul ingenooi is, vra hul om dan nou die nuweling te sien. Die tante sê toe nee, wag, hulle moet eers bietjie tee drink. Die teekoppies is naderhand al koud en vra een van die neefs maar kan hulle dan tog nie nou die baba sien nie. Nee sê die tante, hulle kan eers die baba sien as hy huil. Nou maar waarom moet hulle wag voordat die baba huil voor hul hom kan sien, wil die familie verbaas weet. "Want ek kan nie onthou waar ek hom neergesit het nie!"

Dankie weer aan almal vir jul mooi briewe; een wat my baie getref het was van Dehan Liebenberg. Alhoewel hul al meer as 10 jaar grondeienaars is, woon hul nog nie self hier nie, maar sedert my maandeliks brief kyk hul met nuwe oë na die diere en plante hier! Dis vir my wonderlik om so-iets te hoor, want dis tog waaronder dit gaan, dat my brief ander sal inspireer om net so passievol oor ons diere en plante te wees as wat ek en Garfield is. En siende dit 'n "herdenking" van die Celtis is, gun my maar die vryheid om persoonlik te raak en my liewe man te bedank vir sy aanmoediging en geduld en veral sy hulp met die uitsoek tussen letterlik honderde foto's om altyd die mooiste een te probeer kry vir die brief en webwerf. Dankie ook aan my dogter, Alicia, vir haar bemoedigende woorde en aansporing en dat sy dink haar ma se Celtis briewe is altyd baie koel!



Scrub Hare (Photo Jenny Johnson SCE126)



Guinea Fowl (Photo Nick Rosenberg SCE154)



Rooibeklyster Kurrichane Thrush (Foto Leon Bylsma SCE152)



Sunset (Photo Michael van Harmelen SCE157)



Gevriesde spuitfontein (Foto Karina Dispan SCE142)



Swartoog Tiptol Dark-capped Bulbul (Photo Leon Bylsma SCE152)



Swartborsslangarend met prooi (selfoon foto Sonja Trichardt SCE136)

Tot volgende maand / until next month - Totsiens, goodbye, adios, ciao, yia sas en do svidaniya!

