

# *Celtis africana*

Sterkfontein Country Estates

October/Oktober 2014

Good day Sterkfonteinites and friends of the Celtis!

The eagle has landed! Yes folks, our latest chick has hatched and both parents are very busy looking after it. Up until Monday, 22 September, we noticed that only the female was on the nest all the time. On Tuesday, 23 September, I went to lunch with clients and all of a sudden both parents were at the nest, one obviously feeding the chick as could be seen from the way it was bent over whilst the other one sat close-by! Since then both parents have been very active at times around the nest!

Have a look at the special page we created for our eagles on the website (under Fauna – “Birds”) and enjoy all the interesting information and facts about these iconic birds I managed to find!

At the moment nothing can be seen of the little one, as it is obviously very small, but very soon we shall once again see the whitish head sticking out above the nest, ducking and diving as soon as it spots anything remotely looking like an enemy.



Henrietta, the female Black-chested Snake Eagle on the nest (*Photo Elmarie Krige*)

Let us hope Mother Nature will be kind to this one and that it will grow up strong and healthy. It is very vulnerable at the moment and should not be disturbed. Another big problem for the parents is the crows. Even whilst still breeding, the crows would fly around the area and have aerial combats with the male who tried to chase them away from the nesting site. The crows are very aggressive and of course, even though it is much stronger and bigger in size, the eagle is clumsier and does not have the ability to dive and swerve like smaller birds.

On one of my walks I encountered Jenny Johnson (SCE 126) and we watched as four crows were hassling the poor male who was defending his territory against these rogues. The crow has become a big problem in urban areas as well, hassling domestic pets such as cats and small dogs, taking lapwing chicks and other small birds from their nests. I have seen many videos of their cruelty.

Once we have witnessed a crow acting aggressively towards a mongoose at a small watering hole. We have made this especially for wildlife such as the mongoose and this stinker tried preventing it from getting to the water! The mongoose promptly went onto its hind legs, tail upright, hair standing up and taking a very aggressive stance. The crow obviously felt threatened by the slightly taller mongoose and eventually took off in a huff!

The other fantastic news is that, on the same vacant plot where the eagles are nesting, we now also have a pair of breeding black-shouldered kites! I noticed for some time one of them sitting on one of two trees in the same area. One of the trees where it would perch turned out to be the nesting site. This I discovered by accident as I walked through the veld trying to get a close-up photo of the kite. I got quite a fright when suddenly the female flew out of the nest just under the treetop. Only then did I realize they were breeding! I left quickly and saw with great relief the female returning to the nest.

The male kite, if not away on a hunting trip, would sit for long periods in the same tree where the nest is, or in another tree nearby, keeping watch over the nesting site. It also acted very aggressively towards the male eagle.

The eagle was in the habit, during the breeding season, to bring food to the female on the nest and after delivering the meal, it would sit in one of two nearby trees to watch that she is okay, grooming itself for a while and then fly off again in search of more food. Both trees the eagle would rest on and groom itself, also turned out to be the kite's "property" – the one being the chosen nesting site and the other the site it used to sit in and watch over "its" area! Never mind that the eagles were first in the area and claimed it for their nesting site! The poor eagle would be chased off and followed by the much swifter and more agile kite, bumping it in mid-air until it would leave the area. Our poor eagles really have a rough time, but never mind; they succeeded, as I have mentioned, to bring a new chick into the world!

The nest of this kite is a loose "platform" of twigs, constructed just under the treetop in a fork, in which 3- 4 eggs are laid. The eggs are cream with red spots and

incubation is on average 30 days. The female mostly does the incubation, but when the chicks hatch, the male is the one that spends more time foraging for food. The food will be passed on to the female for feeding to the chicks. It mainly eats rodents, but small mammals, invertebrates, large insects such as grasshoppers and crickets, lizards and even the odd small snake or frog as prey have also been recorded. The chicks make their first flight when between 33-37 days of age, only becoming fully independent between 42 and 70 days of age.



**Male Black-shouldered Kite keeping watch (Photo Elmarie Krige)**

For a better photo of this kite, have a look at the "Birds" page of the website (<http://sterkfonteincountrystates.org.za>)

The adult black-shouldered kite is a small and graceful, predominantly pale grey and white raptor with a black patch on the upper wing, and red eyes. The back is a darker bluish grey, the legs and feet are yellow and the bill black. Their forward-facing eyes and soft plumage is somewhat owl-like. Sexes are alike in plumage, with the female being slightly larger than the male. The black-shouldered kite is certainly not rare, one often sees them hovering alongside highways above ground looking for prey. I just think it is wonderful that a breeding pair have chosen our Estate as home. Now we have to sets of pest control on our Estate so no need to poison rodents or kill snakes!

Have a look at these fluffy bundles of joy – these are blacksmith lapwing chicks. Garfield caught them on camera whilst they were running around in our veggie patch – the hysterical parents looking on from the other side of the fence. Aren't they just too cute!



**Blacksmith lapwing chick with VERY large feet! (Photo Garfield Krige)**

A lot of plants started flowering in the veld – and this was before any rain had fallen! Just shows you **how** hardy these plants are, pushing through hard, dry soil and producing the loveliest flowers for us. One of them is the beautiful *Eulophia hians* orchid (see more under Flora – Our Orchids on the website). Have a look at the photos of plants in flower at the moment. I for one am so glad to live out here where one is exposed to these gifts of nature! We really enjoy being outdoors; trying to spot something new or interesting on our property every time we are outside.



**Beautiful flower of the *Moraea thomsonii* (Photo Garfield Krige)**



*Albuca setosa* (Slymuintjie)



*Trachyandra* Sp. (Photos Garfield Krige)



*Becium obovatum* - can you spot the ant? (Photo Garfield Krige)



*Eulophia hians* orchid (Photo Garfield Krige)



*Dianthus mooiensis* (Photo Elmarie Krige)



*Ipomoea obscura* (Wild petunia - Wilde patat) (Photo Elmarie Krige)



*Cyanotis speciosa* (Doll's powder puff) (Photo Elmarie Krige)



Strongly citrus oil scented *Osteospermum muricatum* (Photo Elmarie Krige)



*Dolichos angustifolius* (Wild pea) (Photo Elmarie Krige)

**“You’re only here for a short visit. Don’t hurry, don’t worry. And be sure to smell the flowers along the way.” Walter Hagen (1892 – 1969), American professional golfer.**

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Goeiedag Sterkfonteiners en Celtis vriende!

Goeie nuus - die nuwe arendbaba is hier! Ja, liewe vriende, ons nuutste toevoeging tot die arend-familie het uitgebroei en ma en pa arend is woes besig om kos aan te dra en te sorg vir die kleintjie. Tot en met Maandag 22 September was dit steeds net die wyfie wat die nes warm gehou het. Maar skielik, op Dinsdag die 23e, op pad uit vir middagete saam met ‘n kliënt, sien ek beide die volwassenes by die nes, die ma vooroor gebuig en duidelik besig om stukkie van ‘n prooi af te pluk en te voer aan die onsigbare kleintjie – en pa arend wat goedkeurend toekyk. Sedertdien is beide ouers met tye baie aktief by die nes.





**Henrietta, die wyfie Swartborsslangarend op die nes (Foto Elmarie Krige)**

Kyk gerus op die webblad na die spesiale bladsy wat oopgemaak is vir ons arende (klik op Fauna - Birds en dan op "Our Eagles") en geniet al die interessante dinge wat ek omtrent hierdie pragvoël opgespoor het!

Op hierdie stadium is daar nog niks van die kleintjie te siene nie, maar weldra sal ons weer die ou wit koppie bokant die nes sien uitsteek, besig om die omgewing te bekyk. En dan begin die wegduik-speletjie, die koppie verdwyn sodra iets maar net effens lyk na gevaar om 'n rukkie later weer ewe nuuskierig bokant die nes uit te steek!

Ons hoop maar Moeder Natuur sal die keer nie allerhande storms en koue stuur sodat die kleintjie mooi en sterk kan grootword. Vir nou is die nes baie kwesbaar en moet hulle liefies nie gepla word nie. 'n Groot probleem vir die arende is kraaie. Selfs gedurende die broeitydperk was kraaie gedurig in die nes se omgewing – sekerlik besig met bouse gedagtes oor hoe om die eier of die kleintjie te probeer steel sou die ouers net hul rug vir 'n oomblik draai. Ek het gesien hoe hulle aggressief die mannetjie in lugaanvalle van die nesarea af verjaag. Alhoewel die arend heelwat groter en vinniger op lang afstande is, moet mens onthou dat hulle lomp is en nie die vermoë het om skielik te swenk of kort draaie te maak nie.

Eenkeer het ek Jenny Johnson (SCE 126) langs die pad gekry en ons het toegekyk hoe vier van die skurke die arme mannetjie so verpes terwyl hy sy bes doen om sy gebied te beskerm. Die kraai het ook'n groot probleem in stedelike gebiede geword. Hulle val vreesloos huisdiere soos katte en kleiner hondjies aan en huiwer nie om baba

kiewiete te vang of ander klein voëltjies uit hul nessies te gryp en dood te maak nie. Ek het al heelwat videomateriaal van hul wreedheid gesien.

Eenkeer het ons gesien hoe aggressief hulle teenoor een van ons rooimeerkatte optree. Ons het 'n spesiale watergat gemaak waar diertjies soos die meerkatte hul dors kan les. Een oggend sien ons 'n kraai wat aggressief 'n meerkat probeer keer om by die watergat te kom. Die meerkatjie het ewe dapper op die agterpootjies gaan staan, stert gepof, hare orent en toe die ou lelikerd sien die meerkat lyk darem baie groter en kwaaiër as hy, het hy met lelike gekrys die aftog geblaas.

Die ander wonderlike nuus is dat 'n broeipaar blouvalkies nou ook nes geskop het op ons Estate - net 'n entjie van die arendsnes af! Vir geruime tyd al het ek die valkie op een van twee bome gesien sit en een dag besluit ek om nader te stap om 'n foto te neem; toe ek verby die een boom stap skrik ek myself koud toe die wyfie skielik vanuit die boom reg verby my vlieg! Toe eers beseef ek daar moet natuurlik 'n nes wees en dat die mannetjie maar net doen wat hy moet doen – hou die area dop vir kos en moontlike vyande! Ek het vinnig pad gegee en met groot verligting gesien die wyfie keer terug na die boom waarin die nes is.

Die valkie beskerm hul nes en area verbete teen indringers en ek moes die mannetjie se aggressiwiteit tenoor die arende al 'n paar maal aanskou. Die arendmannetjie het die gewoonte gehad om, gedurende die broeiseisoen, kos aan te dra vir die wyfie. Nadat hy dit vir haar gegee het, sou hy in een van twee nabygeleë bome gaan sit en dophou of alles reg is by die nesarea en sy vere bietjie versorg, voordat hy na 'n rukkie weer sou wegvlieg op soek na meer kos.

Ongelukkig is dit nou so dat die blouvalkie ook juis hierdie selfde twee bome as “sy” eiendom gekies het – die een vir sy nes en die ander een om in te sit en die area te bespied.. Hy het nie 'n saak met die feit dat die arend eerste in die area was nie, en sal die arme mannetjie verjaag en hom dan agtervolg. In die lug is die arend al deur die ratser en vinniger valkie gestamp totdat hy uiteindelik uit die area padgee. Ons arme arende het werklik 'n harde tyd, maar gelukkig het hulle darem daarin geslaag om 'n kuiken in die wêreld te bring en hoop ons maar net die arme outjie oorleef!

Die blouvalkie se nes bestaan uit 'n losserrige tipe “platform” van takkies in 'n vurk, net onder die blaredak, van, gewoonlik, 'n akasia. Drie tot 4 roomwit eiers met rooi spikkels op word gelê en inkubasie neem sowat 30 dae. Die wyfie doen meeste van die broeiwerk, terwyl die mannetjies verantwoordelik is vir die kos. Nadat die eiers uitgebroei het, is dit steeds hoofsaaklik die mannetjie wat jag en die prooi sal dan na die wyfie gebring word wat dit aan die kuikens voer. Hul kos bestaan hoofsaaklik uit knaagdierse asook klein soogdiertjies; groterige insekte soos krieke en sprinkane, 'n akkedis of twee en selfs klein slangetjies of paddas is ook al ten prooi geval. Die kleintjies se eerste vlug is op sowat 33-37 dae en dit neem tussen 42 en 70 dae om heeltemal onafhanklik van die ouers te raak.

Die volwasse blouvalkie se onderkant is hoofsaaklik wit tot liggrys en hul rugkante is 'n grysblou kleur. Dit is 'n grasieuse klein roofvoël met 'n swart vlek bo-op die

skouergedeelte, geel pote en bene, helder rooi oë en 'n swart snawel. Die oë wat vorentoe wys herinner mens nogal aan uile se voorkoms. Beide geslagte valk is dieselfde in voorkoms, hoewel die wyfie effens groter as die mannetjie is. Hierdie valkie is geensins skaars nie - mens sien gereeld van hulle oorhoops langs ons hoofweë of bokant grasvelde waar hul op een plek fladder of rondswewe, op soek na prooi. Maar vir my is dit wonderlik dat hulle ook ons Estate uitgekies het as 'n tuiste en broeiplek! Nou het ons sommer twee stalle pesbeheer en is daar geen rede om knaagdiere te vergiftig of slange net dood te maak nie!

Kyk tog net die oulike donsbondeltjies – hierdie is bontkiewiet babas wat Garfield op film vasgelê het in ons groentetuin. Die histeriese ouerpaar was aan die anderkant van die draad, doodbang ons gaan hul babas iets aandoen! Waar kry mens nou ouliker!



**Baba bontkiewiet - Kyk my groot voete! (Foto Garfield Krige)**

Heelwat van ons veldplante het begin blom, en let wel, dit voordat daar enige reën geval het! Dit bewys net weer **hoe** gehard sommige van die plante is – om sonder enige water deur die harde droë grond te kan beur en hul pragtige blommetjies vir ons te kan wys! Een van die wat nou in blom is, is die mooi orgideetjie, die *Eulophia hians* (kyk gerus op die webwerf onder Flora – “Our Orchids” vir meer besonderhede oor die plant.) Hier is ook 'n paar foto's van ander blommetjies wat nou te siene is. Dis wat darem so lekker is van hier buite die stad woon – mens is gedurig omring deur allerhande mooi en interessante dinge – en dit alles gratis! Vir ons is dit 'n seëning om gedurig in die buitelug te kan rondloop op ons stukkie grond en te kyk wat is daar wat nuut is in die veld!



Die pragtige *Moraea thomsonii* (Bloutulp) (Foto Garfield Krige)



*Becium obovatum* (Foto Garfield Krige)



*Hypoxis sp. (Afrika aartappel) (Photo Elmarie Krige)*

**Tot volgende maand: Totsiens, goodbye, adios, ciao, yia sas en do svidaniya!**

