

Celtis africana

Sterkfontein Country Estates

December/Desember 2014

Good day Celtis friends!

Our Estate is looking so lovely and green and the veld is full of little flowers after the nice, soft rains we have had! Luckily - no heavy storms like in the past, so the road is still looking good, no water damage like we've had time after time last year and most years before.

Of course with the rains came the insects and with the insects came the chameleons – look at the photos taken in our garden. We are aware of at least five living on our plot; obviously there may be more, as one has to REALLY look for them. Their ability to blend in with nature often caused us to look right at it without seeing it! At night we hear the frogs around our ponds and the annual migration of the little white butterflies are in full swing – what a lovely time summer really is!



White migrating butterfly (Photo: Elmarie Krige)

Our Little Wing has grown into a BIG wing; it is proudly sitting on top of the nest surveying the Estate, flapping its wings, jumping up and down, stretching and getting strong. Often when I am watching it, it is just laying flat on top of the nest, stretching its wings almost as if rowing a boat! At almost three months' of age, it is now fully grown, but does not have

the colouring of the adult eagle. Photos taken in November shows it as a tawny-brown colour and now, beginning December, it is slowly turning into brownish black. Anytime soon it will start flying – at first still staying in the vicinity of the nest and, grown-up as it may appear to us, be for the most still dependent on the parents for food.



Little

Wing stretching its wings - note the tawny-brown colour (Photo: Elmarie Krige)

Of course trying to get a proper photo of Little Wing proves to be a rather impossible task. The moment it sees me, it ducks! It is even more alert now than when it was a small chick! So, bear with my photos, they certainly are not the best, taken from the road when I do my walkies with my dog, but it is more to show you guys what colour the juvenile is at this stage of its life.

One day as I walked past, Henrietta was sitting in a tree near the nest. I couldn't see her very well, as she was quite a distance away but nevertheless, I took a couple of shots of her, hoping for something passable. To my amazement, when we downloaded the photos I noticed she actually had a little snake in her mouth! Ready to feed Little Wing, but not venturing anywhere close to the nest whilst I was in the area – no wonder they are seen as secretive birds! One would think they are more or less used to the people and traffic of the Estate, yet a passing car or pedestrian immediately causes the chick to hide and the parents won't go anywhere near the nest in an attempt to hide its existence. Once again, the photo was taken from a distance and very hurriedly too, so not a prize-winning photo - but nevertheless one I am proud of because of its subject matter. Have a look in the Afrikaans section for the photo.

How do I know which is which? Well, look on the website at the “Our Eagles” page. Look at Kgosi’s chest – the black part of its chest makes a sort of wave or indentation in the middle where-as if you look at the photo of Henrietta on the nest, “talking” to her chick, the black is one uniform pattern! See, I love “my” eagles and I have been observing them closely! Or rather as closely as they let me!

For some time now we have been hearing the frantic sounds of a bird in the garden all day long. Then one day we saw the source of the commotion - none other than a little Pin-tailed Whydah! Now this little thing is so cheeky and quite aggressively it will chase away the other birds from the food source. Of course, with the extra appendix of its long tail during breeding season, it does look larger than what it actually is, so the poor little buggers do fly off. A few minutes later they will all come back and start feeding until the Whydah dashes out and with flapping wings and angry calls chase them off again! And so this little game of “who’s the boss” is being played all day long - much to our amusement! The only ones who don’t give fig, are the Yellow-masked weavers who carry on eating or will actually react in an aggressive manner; so the little Whydah leave them well alone!



Pin-tailed Whydah (Photo: Garfield Krige)

I have often seen one near the entrance, but this one obviously flew around and decided our plot is a nice place to settle – lots of seeds being put out every day, plus lots of trees with nests ready to invade. Yes folks, this little bird is actually a squatter of sorts; or at least its chicks are! The male also loves the ladies and may have as many as six wives at a time and each one will lay about five eggs – but very cleverly it will lay them one by one in different nests! The Common Waxbill is usually the one who has to rear the “extra” chick in its nest but luckily, and unlike the cuckoo chicks, the Whydah will not kick out the Waxbill chicks, but happily grow up within the “adopted family”! Imagine how they can multiply and take over an area if each of the five wives lays 6 eggs!

During winter the male will loose its long tail and will be just as dull and drab as the female, so don't think they have left the area if you don't spot them in the colder months, they just changed their appearance a bit! Both Garfield and myself have taken some lovely photos but I am placing one where it was sitting in a nearby bush (waiting for the other birds to settle at the food source so he can chase them away!) and the others are a series of the male taken in flight which I think is so lovely. We were also lucky enough to catch a female eating seeds with the other garden birds.



Two female Pin-tailed whydahs enjoying seeds with their sparrow friend (photo: Garfield Krige)

You all know by now that both Garfield and myself are very passionate about our area as well as of the fauna and flora. This has always been the main purpose of the Celtis letter as well as in creating our website – we wanted to share our knowledge and encourage others to help protect the Cradle and all that exists here for future generations. It is not only read by you guys living on the Estate, but there are a number of people on my mailing list, living in other areas of the Cradle, who find the information interesting and helpful. They have subsequently forwarded it to others and thus more people will hopefully see how precious our heritage is and help conserve and protect it.

Others, not even living in the Cradle area, have told me they look with fresh eyes at what is around them. With a chain reaction like that, who knows what wonderful things can come of this! If I can inspire even just one more person to be conservation conscious, then I have definitely reached the purpose of the letter and the website!

So then, when somebody else from the Estate does something positive without being asked to, and just because they care about the same things, I am just so-o-o-o happy. Rob and Jen of plot 126 are just such people. Even though they are not living on the Estate as yet, the Celtis of January 2014 prompted them to take action.

In that edition, I wrote about the dreaded pom-pom weed, which is a threat to indigenous plants not just here, but all over our country. This invasive plant is very hard to eradicate as it has an underground root system, so it has to be repeatedly removed when it shows its ugly head, or be sprayed with poison, something of which I am not in favour of, as one might just be killing off some of our own indigenous plant species too.

Back to Rob and Jen; they subsequently found out about research having been done on a certain thrips that was brought in to try and control the problem of the pom-pom weed. They not only sent out an email about it at the time, but also stayed in touch with the people from PPRI who supply these thrips for free, so that when the time comes for the pom-pom to start making its appearance, it can be collected and released to start doing its work! Additionally they went all the way to Pretoria to collect some of these thrips and subsequently released them on the Estate!

Now if THAT doesn't deserve a big round of applause, then I don't know. In the meantime, and until such time the thrips they have multiplied adequately, please, if you see these horrors on your property take them out. If you go onto the website under Invasive Plant Species you will see why it is such a pest and why we, especially in a place like the Cradle, should do our utmost to control and eradicate this invasive pest. Remember we will all be affected by the spread of this plant if we don't act. And its no use one person acts and the neighbour does not, we really should all work together in this matter.

I am including this background information, which Jenny has kindly forwarded to me:

Liothrips tractabilis: a thrips insect released for bio control of pompom weed

This biological control agent has proved very effective against the pompom weed, labelled the 'most serious threat to grasslands and wetlands' in South Africa by the Agricultural Research Council (ARC). These weeds with their pretty pink flowers are dangerous invaders! Their distribution has almost doubled in the past 5 years, mainly because of their copious seed production and people who unknowingly pick their beautiful flowers and spread the seeds.

After 7 years of research and testing permission was granted by the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries to release the thrips, *Liothrips tractabilis*, which are native to Argentina. The insect was collected there on *Campuloclinium macrocephalum* (pompom weed) in 2005, and imported to South Africa where it was cultured and tested in quarantine to demonstrate that it is host specific (does not feed or lay eggs on any other plants) and is damaging to pompoms. In October 2013 it finally tasted freedom when the first field releases were made in and around Pretoria, followed by releases in Mpumalanga, Limpopo, the Free State and KZN.

The thrips feed on Pompon stems and leaves, drastically deforming plant growth, which reduces flowering and ultimately prevents seeding. Stunting the growth takes time and the effects may only be seen over several years. Unfortunately, owing to its robust root system, mechanical control is ineffective and the disturbance may even stimulate further

growth leading to denser stands. **Although several herbicides have been registered for use on pompom, especially for roadside application, they are not recommended for use in ecologically sensitive areas!**

Adult pompom thrips are black and measure only a couple of millimetres in length. They are strong and ready fliers. Immature pompom thrips are orange, with traces of black, and they are flightless. The adults lay eggs either singly or in clumps on the stems and leaves of pompoms. They hatch after about 10 days at 25 C.

Biological control by means of pompom thrips is likely to be the **only** long-term, sustainable means to control the pompom weed. We, and the PPRI, will be monitoring progress on our plot to see whether it will provide a solution for the estate.



Pompom weed



Rob releasing the thrips



Thrips doing their thing! (Photos courtesy Jenny Johnson SCE126)

Thanks again Rob and Jen!

All that is left for me is to wish you all a wonderful, joyous festive season and may 2015 be prosperous and full of happiness for one and all! For those lucky enough to be going on holiday – do drive with care and come home safely!

Goeie dag Celtis vriende!

Na die lieflike sagte reën die afgelope tyd is die veld pragtig groen en oral kom wilde blommetjies voor op ons Estate. Gelukkig hou die pad darem; sover het ons nog niks van die erge storms en verspoelings van verlede jaar of vorige jare gehad nie!

Na die reën is daar skielik insekte oral en met hulle aankoms, kom die verkleurmannetjies oral in ons tuin tevoorskyn! Ons het sover vyf getel, maar daar mag natuurlik meer wees. Getrou aan hul naam is dit so maklik vir hulle om “onsigbaar” te wees en soms sal ek of Garfield reg teen die diertjie vaskyk sonder om dit raak te sien! Hulle is vir my so oulik en natuurlik doen hulle goeie werk ook. Snags hoor ons die verskillende paddakore by ons dammetjies en die migrasie van die klein wit skoenlappertjies is ook in volle swang – mens beleef die seisoensverskille en die natuur net soveel intenser hier buite die dorp!



Verkleurmannetjie in ons tuin (Foto: Elmarie Krige)

Little Wing het amper oornag 'n pragtige uitgegroeide arend geword en as hy nie aan't wegkruip is nie, sit hy trots op die nes die area en bekyk. Die vlerke word gereeld geklap terwyl hy sy hele lyf amper oplig. Soms sal hy laag bo-op die nes lê en die vlerke net na agter strek – kompleet asof hy besig is om te roei! Op ouderdom van amper drie maande is hy ten volle uitgegroeい, en foto's van November wys hom as 'n toffiebruin kleur terwyl

foto's wat ek nou begin Desember geneem het, wys dat sy kleur stadig maar seker verander na donkerbruin-swart. Hy sal baie binnekort kort entjies begin vlieg, maar steeds naby die nes bly en alhoewel hy in ons oë al uitgegroeい blyk te wees, is hy steeds grootliks afhanglik vir kos van die ouers. Ek bly praat van "hy" en "hom" maar Little Wing mag dalk 'n wyfie ook wees!



Little Wing afgeneem op 02/12/2014. Let op die kleurverandering (Foto: Elmarie Krige)

Om nou natuurlik 'n goeie foto te kry is soos om sop met 'n vurk te probeer eet! As hy as kuiken oplettend was is hy twee keer so wakker nou wat hy groter is. Nes ek dink ek het nou 'n goeie skoot dan is hy weg. So, my foto's is weereens nie te waffers nie, my kamera het nie al die wonderlike lense wat Garfield s'n het nie, maar minstens kan julle die kleurverskil tussen die tiener en volwasse voël sien.

Op een van my vele oggendstappies, het Henrietta in 'n boom naby die nes gesit. Ek wou nie lank stop nie, want ek weet sy gee vinnig pad, maar ek dog ek sal 'n paar skote probeer inkry en net dalk is iets bruikbaar. Groot was my verassing toe ons die foto's aflaai en ek sien dat sy al die tyd met 'n slangetjie in haar bek sit! Gereed om haar groot baba te voer, maar heeltemal te versigtig om onnodige aandag op die nes te vestig. Geen wonder hulle word as taamlik geheimsinnige voëls beskou nie; mens sou dink met die wat hul al 'n paar jaar op ons Estate nesmaak sou hul gewoond wees aan die mense en voertuie; maar nee, slimmer as die houtjie van die galg, sal die kuiken vinnig "verdwyn" as 'n voetganger of kar verbykom. Die ouer sal dan ook nie naby aan die nes gaan in 'n poging om die nes se bestaan weg te steek. Weereens, die foto is van ver af afgeneem, maar dis vir my steeds lekker om spesifieke tipe foto te kon neem!

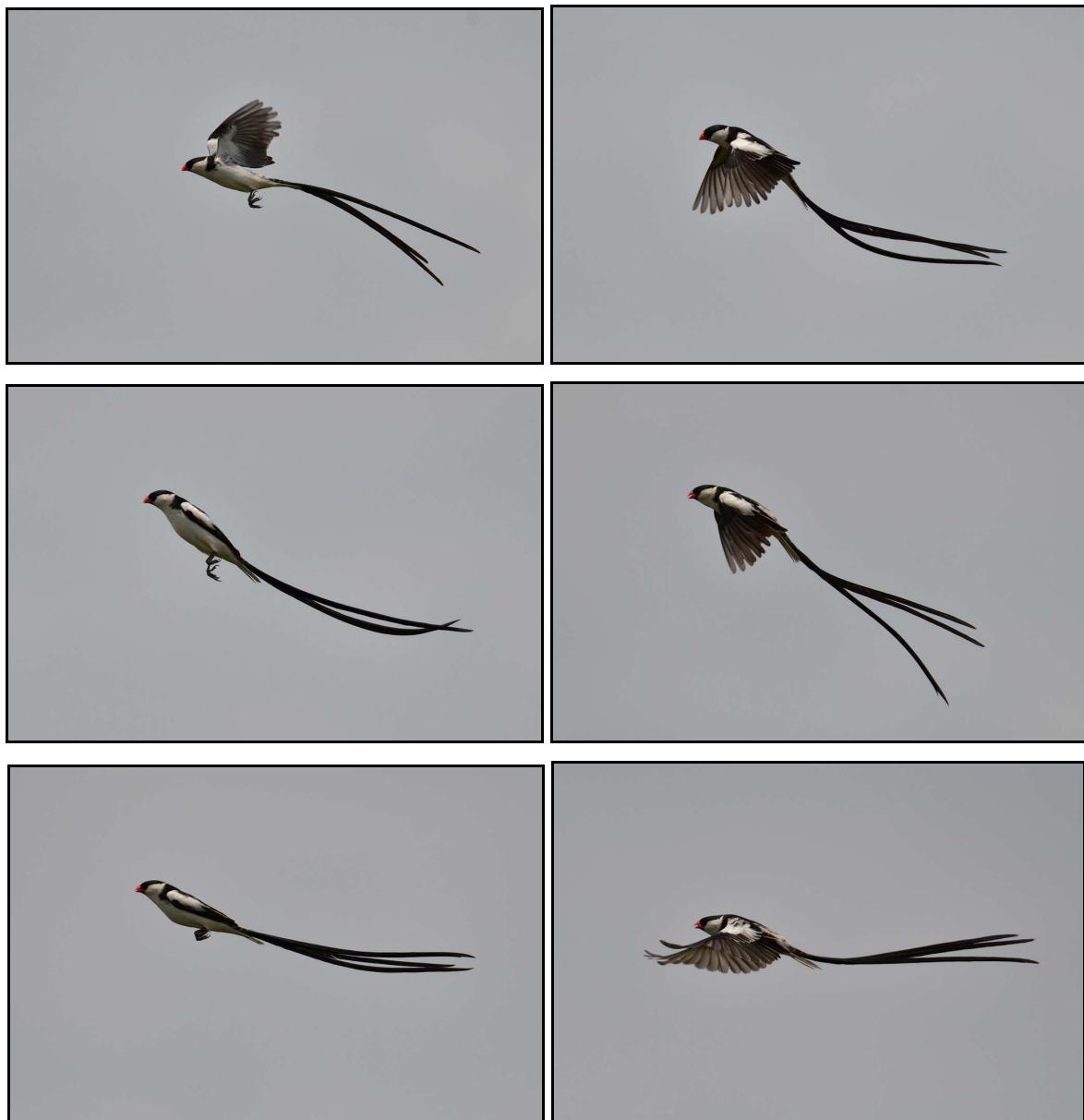


Henrietta met slang (Foto: Elmarie Krige)

Nou hoe weet ek wie is Kgosi en wie is Henrietta? Aha, ek het hulle baie goed bestudeer – kyk gerus op ons webwerf onder Our Eagles. Die foto's van Kgosi wys duidelik dat die vere opsy bors 'n patroon maak met 'n tipe "inham" in die donker gedeelte, (om dit nou so te noem) in die middel van sy bors. Kyk dan na die foto van Henrietta waar sy "praat" met haar kuiken en let op dat die vere eweredig 'n donker "blok" vorm op haar bors! Ek het "my" arende baie goed dopgehou!

Van voëls gepraat, die afgelope tyd het ons heeldaglank 'n heel histeries voëlgeluid in ons tuin gehoor. Toe eendag sien ons die oorsaak – 'n Koningrooibekmannetjie! Die meneertjie is heel aggressief teenoor die ander tuinvoëls en laat een nou net waag om aan die saad te kom pik dan word die met woeste vlerkgeklap en protestasies weggejaag. Met die wat hy in die broeiseisoen 'n mooi lang stert het, lyk hy natuurlik groter en die arme volkies gee gedwee pad. Na 'n rukkie sal hul weer hongerig dit waag om gou te kom eet en die dieselfde storie sal van vooraf begin en so gaan dit heeldaglank aan – tot ons groot vermaak! Die enigste wat hul glad nie aan sy manewales steur nie is die swartkeelgeelvinke. Inteendeel, hulle gaan rustig voort met vreet en sal selfs soms bietjie aggressief optree teenoor die knaap.

Ek het hul al heel partykeer onder naby die ingang gesien, maar die een het seker rondgevlieg en gesien hier word saad uitgesit en hier is genoeg bome met nessies waar sy kuikens kan gaan plak. Ja liewe vriende, die kêreltjie is 'n opportunis van die eerste water en ook alte lief vir die skoner geslag. Hy kan tot vyf wyfies op 'n slag in sy harem hê en elkeen van die dames lê tot ses eiers – ewe skelm een vir een in 'n ander nes. Die arme ou Rooibeksries is gewoonlik die ongelukkiges wat die ekstra kuiken moet grootmaak. Gelukkig sal die koningrooibekkuiken darem nie soos die koekoek die arme sysiekuijens uitskop nie, maar heel tevrede saam met sy aangenome broers en sisters grootword!



Koningrooibek mannetjie in vlug (Fotos: Garfield Krige)

Gedurende die wintermaande verloor die mannetjie sy stert en is dan maar vaal in voorkoms nes die wyfies. Ons het albei mooi foto's van die voëltjie kon neem, maar ek dink die van Garfield is so mooi en veral die reeks van die mannetjie in vlug dat ek nie eers daaraan **gedink** het om van myne te gebruik nie. Wat 'n jammerte ons kon nie die ware grootte fotos in hierdie Celtis plaas nie - glo my, die werklike foto's is net baie beter!

Julle weet by die tyd hoe passievol beide ek en Garfield oor die Estate in besonder en die Cradle in die geheel is – dit was ook die uitsluitlike doel van die Celtis en natuurlik ons webwerf. Ons het van die begin gevoel hier is soveel unieke goed en dit moet op 'n manier met ander gedeel word sodat mens die dinge vir ons nageslag kan bewaar. Omdat heelwat mense wat ook in die Cradle area woon ook op my adreslys is en hulle weer die Celtis aanstuur na ander maak dit natuurlik dat meer en meer mense ook leer oor diere en plante van ons omgewing en so maak dit meer en meer mense bewus van bewaring.

Mense wat glad nie hier rond woon lees ook gereeld die Celtis en verskeie het al aan my geskryf dat hulle met nuwe oë in hul omgewing rondkyk en vir my is dit die heel beste kompliment – as ek net een ander persoon kan inspireer om bewaringsbewus te raak dan is dit alles die moeite werd. Op die ou einde is dit ‘n kettingbreaksie en dis ons kinders se erfenis wat die wenner is!

As ek dan hoor van iemand anders wat grond hier het wat ons passie deel, maak dit my vrekkelukkig! Twee sulke mense is Rob en Jen wat plot nommer 126 besit. Alhoewel hulle nog nie self hier woon nie, het die Celtis van Januarie 2014 hul geïnspireer om bietjie na te lees oor die aaklike pom-pom plant. Met verdere nalees het Jenny uitgevind dat daar reeds navorsing aan die gang is op ‘n sekere tipe insek se uitwerking op die uitwissing van hierdie indringer pesplant.

Hierdie indringer is nie net by ons nie, maar oor die hele land ‘n massiewe probleem en julle kan gerus op die webwerf onder Invasive Plant Species meer gaan lees oor hoe sleg die plant vir bv drakrag van ‘n area is en hoe moeilik dit is om uit te roei. Jenny het ook ‘n algemene e-pos aan almal gestuur dat hulle in kontak is met die mense van PPRI en sodra die plant hierdie somer begin kopuitsteek, hulle iets aan die saak gaan doen.

Rob het op eie koste al die pad Pretoria toe gery om ‘n klomp van die insekte te gaan kry en dis op hulle plot losgelaat en sal hulle saam met die mense van PPRI die situasie dophou. Nou as die twee mense nie applous verdien nie dan weet ek sowaar nie!

Lees asseblief die stuk wat Jen goedgunstig aan my gestuur het oor die navorsing en hopelik oplossing van hierdie groot probleem. Dis baie belangrik dat ons in hierdie geval almal saamwerk; as net een persoon die plante help uitroeи en die buurman doen dit nie gaan dit niks help nie. Op hierdie stadium sal ons asseblief nog almal ons deel moet doen en, sodra ons een van die plante sien, dit uitspit. Ek is nie vreeslik ten gunste vir die gebruik van gif nie – ons bly in ‘n ekologiese sensitiewe area en kan maklik van ons eie inheemse plante ook so uitroeи. Weereens, lees asseblief die stuk in die Engelse afdeling. Die pom pom het ‘n ondergrondse wortelstelsel en is glad nie maklik om uit te roei nie; dus, totdat die insekte goed ingeburger is en hul ding begin doen, is dit elkeen van ons se plig om hierdie vieslike goed te help in toom hou.

Dankie weer aan Rob en Jen wat soveel omgee vir die bewaring van ons area!

Nou bly daar niks verder vir my oor as om net julle almal ‘n aangename feesgety toe te wens en mag 2015 vol voorspoed en geluk wees! Aan almal wat weggaan met vakansie – ry versigtig en kom weer veilig huis!



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