

Celtis africana

Sterkfontein Country Estates

January/Januarie 2015

Good day to all the Sterkfonteinites and Celtis friends!

I wish all of you a very happy and prosperous 2015 and with this also want to welcome all the new people who wanted to be included on the mailing list of the Celtis letter! I trust you will also enjoy reading my monthly chats and be inspired to get to know more about what is great and wonderful in the Cradle area!

I trust everyone had a great festive season and that you are well rested after the holidays. Of course the holidays made me lazy too, but after a short, but wonderful break, I am back to tell you more about all the interesting goings-on on our Estate!

Firstly some eagle news. Poor Little Wing had a bit of a scare (and so did we!) but luckily escaped unscathed! We almost thought we had lost another eagle, but all's well that ends well, as the saying goes! What happened is that on Friday night, the 5th of December, we had extremely heavy winds (I sometimes feel as if we are living in PE!) and when we went to town on Saturday morning, we noticed the tree in which the nest is, was leaning over a lot to the one side. However, Little Wing was sitting happily on top of the nest, awaiting its next titbit from mom Henrietta.

Then Saturday night (the 6th) we had even stronger winds and we were quite worried about the tree. Sunday we had to go to a concert in Pretoria, but decided to quickly go and see if the tree is still standing. When we got there, the whole tree had fallen over and the nest was empty. Henrietta was sitting in a nearby tree with a small snake in her beak, but we could find no sign of Little Wing. Garfield and I walked a grid and looked under each bush, but of course since they are masters of disguise, Little Wing was probably sitting somewhere safe, laughing in its sleeve (or in a eagle's case laughing in its wing!) at these two human beings stumbling through the grass over rocks and through holes and what not, trying to find him.



Fallen tree with nest (Photo Elmarie Krige 07/12/2014)



"What the heck happened here?" (Photo Elmarie Krige 08/12/2014)



"It was that wind, you know, that Sterkfontein wind... It came from up there! " (Photo Elmarie Krige 08/12/2014)

I was close to tears, thinking the wind may have blown it away, that it got hurt and was lying somewhere injured – all kinds of nasty thoughts running through my head. And seeing mom Henrietta was sitting there with food for her chick and it was nowhere to be seen made me feel even more choked up! We did not have a lot of time as had to leave for Pretoria and just hoped for the best. Coming back late afternoon from the concert, there was Little Wing - sitting on the low branches of

the fallen tree next to the empty nest, probably wondering what the heck had happened! Happy eagle, happy me!

For the next couple of days it would sit forlornly next to the nest. However, it must have realised being so close to the ground and predators is not safe and then moved. Little Wing just happened to choose the tree in which our new residents, the Black-shouldered kites, had their nest during their breeding season -see Celtis of October 2014. Luckily by now the little kites had hatched and flown the nest, otherwise there would definitely have been some skirmishes, as the kites do not like intruders around their nesting site if there are eggs or chicks in it. Whilst Henrietta was still on her egg and Kgosi would bring her food, the kite would time and time again chase him off if he would so much as take a little rest in a nearby tree. The male would chase him, following him around in the air, bumping against him, until he felt he has done a good job chasing our poor Kgosi off! Imagine what would have happened to poor Little Wing if the female kite was still on the nest! At least we now knew that Little Wing COULD fly should danger arise.

But as it is with these eagles, Little Wing is still very much a mommy's baby and only fly short distances and for the most part, as we have observed, would still be sitting most of the day on its new chosen tree in their area, or else on the rooftop of an outbuilding. We often still see Henrietta bringing him food. According to my research, even after starting to hunt on its own, the juvenile may still stay in the area for up to 18 months – if you haven't read the page on our eagles on the website yet, do have look, it is very interesting!

In the Celtis of October 2013, I wrote a piece on the Southern Fiscals that seem to abound on our Estate. Obviously food is plentiful in our area, as I see lots of them whenever I walk on Malmani road. Once again we had a pair that made a nest in the Kei Apple tree on our property. As the nest was quite low and near our house, Garfield was lucky to be able to take quite a lot of photos of the nest and the eggs, the hatchlings and the little fledglings. If I say "little", it is a bit of an understatement as the chicks are fat, puffy little things, whilst the poor mother is looking very haggard and quite thin. All she has to do is hunt for food for the ever-hungry chicks, all day long. They just never seem to be getting enough and whenever one of the parents are anywhere in the vicinity, it is a mad flapping of wings and agitated cheeping for more, more and still more!

One thing I forgot to add in that issue is that sometimes the fiscal will break out in the most beautiful song. We all know the buzzing warning sounds they make whenever enemies are near, but if you happen to hear a very sweet song you have never heard before and there is a fiscal in the area, chances are it would be it singing its love song! According to ornithologists, this is not uncommon but mostly heard when a male is trying to impress a female during breeding season. Well, have a look at the lovely series of photographs taken by Garfield, showing the "growing season" (for lack of a better expression!) of a Southern fiscal!

Southern Fiscal - from egg to fledgling (all Photos Garfield Krige)



Left: Father (left) and Mother (right) 11/10/2014



Right: The nest with the eggs 10/11/2014



Just hatched 28/11/2014



We're hungry. Drop food in the orange spaces! 03/12/2014



Left: Mother feeding chicks 05/12/2014



Right: Nest becoming really overcrowded! 08/12/2014



Left: The empty nest! 11/12/2014 Note the building material



Right: The day after leaving the nest 12/12/2014



Safe in the branches of a thorn tree waiting for food 14/12/2014



Feeding time! We need more, more, more... Mother left, chicks right 16/12/2014



While standing on the right leg and gripping a dragonfly with the left, the mother breaks off the head and part of the thorax of the dragon fly and...



...neatly "inserts" it in the gaping orange mouth of one of the chicks...



...while the other chick on the top branch demands its share - flapping wings and all!

We haven't really had much rain – little bits here and there and yet Mother Nature is so generous – all over the veld wild flowers abound and here are some photos of what is around now. I just want to add that all photos of wild flowers on the website and in the Celtis, with the exception of one orchid which was taken on a nearby property, was taken on our plot. From the beginning we have really tried hard to keep as much veld on our property, so that the natural habitat of the flora is kept intact. I would like to urge other property owners, seeing as we are in a world heritage site, to really try to keep some portion of their property – however small, for this purpose as well. After all, isn't it why we came to live out here – to be away from the city and development and to have a little bit of “wilderness” on our own doorstep? Remember species' survival is often directly as a result of the actions of us as human beings!

The same goes for the fauna; most photos were taken on our property, except where mentioned otherwise, such as in the case of our eagles, which is on a nearby property and things like the Natal Sand frog etc. Come on guys, I want you all to be as passionate as we are about our area! I often hear from other people in the Cradle who read the Celtis about spotting this or that which they have seen on our website or read about in the Celtis. They all now are much more conscious of the impact humans can have on the continued survival of species – surely we on this Estate can too? These are all things that will just make our area more sought after as far as living at, or owning property, are concerned. It's not just about living outside the city or for that matter in the Cradle, but to be able to say this rare plant or this orchid actually occurs on my property - bragging rights if you wish! Have a look at the photos in the Afrikaans section, as well as Garfield's action photo of a swift catching its prey.

Till next month, enjoy living in our beautiful area and take a walk on your property and enjoy what nature is offering us!

**“Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's needs, but not every man's greed.”
— Mahatma Gandhi (02/10/1869 – 30/01/1948)**

Goeie dag Sterkfonteiners en vriende van die Celtis!

Ek wens jul almal 'n heerlike en voorspoedige 2015 toe en verwelkom ook graag hiermee al die nuwe mense wat graag op die adreslys vir die Celtis brief wil wees. Ek hoop julle geniet my maandelikse geselsies en dat julle ook graag met nuwe oë na alles om jul in ons wonderlike Cradle area sal kyk!

Ek vertrou almal het 'n heerlike feestyd gehad. Natuurlik is ek ook maar bietjie lui, maar wat, ek is seker baie van julle is ook nog in vakansiestemming en sal my vergewe dat die Celtis so effe laat is die maand! Nou na 'n kort, maar heerlike blaaskansie, is ek terug en reg om weer al die interessante dinge in ons area met julle te deel!

Die nuutste arendnuus is dat ons amper gedink het ons het nog 'n arendkuiken verloor! Arme Little Wing (en natuurlik ons!) het 'n groot skrik hier aan die begin van Desember gehad. Die nag van die 5e Desember het ons erge wind gehad (ek voel baiekeer ons bly in PE – net sonder die see!) en toe ons die Saterdagoggend dorp toe gaan, het ons gesien die boom waarin die nes is lyk darem baie skeef. Maar ons ou kuiken het ewe nonchalant langs die nes gesit en die wêreld bekyk, wagtend op sy volgende happie van ma Henrietta!

Saterdag nag, die 6e Desember, het ons nog sterker wind gehad en ons was maar bekommerd oor die nes. Ons moes Sondag Pretoria toe gaan na 'n konsert maar ek en Garfield wou vinnig gaan kyk of die boom en daarmee saam die nes, nog staande is. Toe ons daar kom het die boom wel omgewaai en die nes wat dus op die sy gelê het was leeg en arme Little Wing was nêrens te siene nie. Op 'n nabygeleë boom het Henrietta gesit met 'n slangetjie in haar bek en ek het sommer net wou huil. Allerhande lelike gedagtes het deur my kop gegaan, soos dat die wind die kuiken weggewaai het en dit nou êrens beseerd lê en al sulke nare goed!

Ek en Garfield het die plek platgeloop, onder bosse, tussen takke en oral gesoek, maar wat weg was, was Little Wing. Maar soos dit is kan arende mos heeltemal plat lê en “verdwyn” en hy het seker heerlik in sy mou gelag (of in 'n arend se geval in sy vlerk gelag!) vir die twee mense wat so rondstropel oor takke en klippe en deur slote – alles net om hom te probeer vind! Tyd het ons egter ingehaal en ons moes klaarmaak om Pretoria toe te gaan en ons het maar net kon hoop vir die beste. Toe ons laatmiddag terugkeer, wat sou ons sien – Little Wing wat laag in die omgevalle boom langs die leë nes sit! Ai ek was baie bly, maar ook bekommerd omdat hy so naby aan die grond gesit het – wie weet wat se predatore in die nag daar rondloop. Gelukkig het ons geweet dat hy wel KAN vlieg sou hy moes!

Die volgende paar dae het Little Wing bietjie troosteloos gelyk waar hy langs die skewe nes sit, maar hy het naderhand seker besef dis te gevaarlik om so laag en naby aan die grond te sit. Die nuwe gekose sitplek is toe in die boom waar die blouvalkie (sien Celtis Oktober 2014) 'n nes die afgelope broeiseisoen gehad het en nie ver van waar die oorspronklike arendsnes is nie. Gelukkig het die valkies intussen uitgebroei en die nes verlaat anders was daar beslis perde! Die blouvalk is baie gebiedsgebonde as daar 'n nes met eiers is en sal enigiets en enigiemand verwoed wegjaag. Ek onthou toe Henrietta nog gebroei het en Kgosi vir haar kos gebring het, hoe verwoed hy weggejaag is as hy maar net 'n rukkie wou rus op 'n boom in die area! Die blouvalkie het hom verjaag en agtervolg in die lug, kort-kort fisies gestamp totdat hy tevrede was hy is ver genoeg weg.

Maar soos die DNA blykbaar in ons arende geskryf is, is Little Wing maar nog lui om self te jag en ons sien gereeld Ma Henrietta aankom met 'n happie. Little Wing sal wel kort entjies vlieg, maar verder sit hy dag lank die area en betrag vanaf die boom in “hul” area of vanaf die dak van 'n nabygeleë buitegebou se dak. So Little Wing is nog steeds grootliks 'n mamma se kindjie en volgens my navorsing en oplees kan die jongeling nog tot op ouderdom van 18 maande in die area bly – die wat nog nie gelees het nie, gaan kyk gerus op die webblad onder Our Eagles.

In die Celtis africana van Oktober 2013 het ek 'n lang stuk geskryf oor een van ons interessante voëls, die laksman (ook bekend as fsikaallaksman, of Jan Fiskaal). Ons sien heelwat van hulle in ons area, want hier is beslis genoegsame kos vir hulle. Iets wat ek nagelaat het om te noem in daardie stuk is dat, behalwe vir die bekende bzzz –waarsku geluid wat mens gereeld hoor as iets of iemand naby hul nes of kleintjies sou kom, hulle ook die pragtigste, soete lied kan sing. Volgens voëlkenners is dit eintlik die mannetjie wat 'n tipe liefdeslied aanhef om die wyfie te beïndruk gedurende die broeiseisoen. So, volgende keer as jy 'n ongewone soetklinkende lied hoor en 'n laksman is in die omgewing, is dit tien teen een hy wat so mooi sing!

Hierdie jaar het ons weer 'n broeipaar op ons plot, en die keer laag in die takke van 'n Keiappel gehad. Met sy lang skerp dorings was dit beslis 'n veilige keuse vir 'n nes. Garfield het die oulikste reeks foto's kon neem van die nes met eiers, die lelike ou blinde kuikentjies en al die pad tot ronde vet voëltjies wat rondwip in takke – kyk gerus hierbo in die Engelse gedeelte. Daar was aanvanklik vier eiers en vier kuikens maar sedert hulle begin rondwip het buite die nes moes een ten prooi van iets geval het, want daar is nou net drie. Ek moet sê, terwyl die kuikens mooi rond en vet is, is die arme ma is al skoon maer en uitgeteer, want heeldag lank is dit net kos soek vir die ewig-honger kuikens. Laat hulle nou net een van die ouers in die omgewing sien, dan trek hul los met 'n woeste geklap van vlerkies en histeriese getjilp vir nog en nog en nog! Foto's in Engelse afdeling.

Alhoewel ons oor die algemeen min reën gehad het, is Moeder Natuur steeds vrygewig met haar skatte. Die veld staan lieflik groen en oral is blomme. Ek wil graag weer herhaal dat alle blomfoto's op die webwerf asook in die Celtis, hier op ons eie plot geneem is met die uitsondering van een orgideë wat op 'n nabygeleë plot geneem is. Van ons hier kom bly het, het ons 'n wesenlike besluit geneem dat ons beslis 'n groot stuk veld wil los vir die habitat van die vele interessante plante wat hier voorkom. Ek sou so graag wou dat almal wat hier woon, so 'n klein stukkie, al is dit hoe klein, veld los vir ons inheemse, en soms skaars plante. So baie plante se voortbestaan is direk afhanklik van die mens se aksies en siende ons in 'n wêrelderfenis plek woon is dit tog sekerlik ons plig om ten minste te probeer bewaar!

Dieselfde geld ook vir die dierefoto's – met die uitsondering van die arende wat op 'n nabygeleë plot broei, die blouvalkies en byvoorbeeld die Natalse sandpadda en waar anders genoem, is alle foto's op ons eiendom geneem. Ek hoor gereeld van ander mense in die area wat ook op die e-pos lys is dat hulle al hierdie blom of plant of daardie slang of iets ook nou op hul eiendom raakgesien het. Komaan ouens, ons mense op die Estate kan regtig ook van ons kant indringerplante uitroei en bietjie oplet na ons eie inheemse plante en hul habitat probeer bewaar. Hierdie is **alles** dinge wat waarde toevoeg tot ons eiendom. Nie net kan mens sê jy woon in 'n wêrelderfenisgebied nie, maar die feit dat jy dalk kan sê hierdie skaars plantjie of daardie orgidee kom voor op jou eiendom – wel dis meer as net rede om te spog sou ek sê!



Links: Wilde Ertjie/ Wild Pea



Regs: *Vahlia capensis*



Links: *Oldenlandia herbacea* (Deurmekaarsterretjiesbos) Regs: *Helichrysum Spp* (Alle foto's Elmarie Krige)



Garfield het hierdie besondere aksiefoto van 'n windswael in vlug geneem, bek oop, 'n millisekonde voor hy sy prooi sluk! Dis nie juis 'n pryswenner foto nie en hy moes alles wat Photohop het inspan om die foto na iets te laat lyk, maar nogtans is dit nie iets wat mens aldag sal sien nie. Die Engelse benaming van "swift" is uiters van pas!

Wat dit nog moeiliker (amper onmoontlik!) maak om 'n foto van windswaels te neem is die feit dat hulle vrek vinnig vlieg - soms tot so vinnig as 120 Km/h! Hulle verander ook blitsig van rigting, so om hierdie foto te kon kry is rêrig 'n vloekskoot! Die foto is met 'n 600mm lens geneem - dis amper asof jy die voël deur 'n strooitjie te probeer volg!



Windswael/Swift (Foto Garfield Krige 06/11/2014)

Van my kant is dit al tot volgende maand. Geniet die buitelig en kyk of julle van ons pragtige inheemse plante op jul eiendom raaksien!

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

