Celtis africana

Sterkfontein Country Estates February/Februarie 2015

Good day and welcome to the February *Celtis africana*! Of course this is the shortest month and also the month of love - for those who enjoy the fun of celebrating Valentine's Day! Not much rain has fallen on the Estate so far and the little we got was so sporadic that some wild flowers never really came into bloom. If I compare rain measured previous years and photos of the masses of colourful wild flowers another years at this time, there is a huge difference. Portions of our plot were literally covered with the beautiful pink *ipomoeas* (our indigenous morning glory – not to be confused with the invasive purple flowering one; do have a look under Invasives on our website if you are not sure whether something is invasive or not) and other colourful flowers.

Ipomoea crassipes **(Photo Elmarie Krige)**

I am very excited about the new page about **Caves** on our website (http://sterkfonteincountryestates.org.za/caves)! I think Garfield has done an outstanding job in explaining the how, what and where of caves in our area and tried to pick only the best photos for the site. Of course a photo could never truly depict the wonders and true beauty of the formations in the caves; but it will at least give you a good idea of what is inside some of them. We've already had quite a few compliments about the page and, in fact, the *Speleological Exploration Club* found it so interesting, they added the page (with our permission, of course) as well as a link

to our website on their own website (http://www.sec-caving.co.za)! Have a look and enjoy!

Wind Gat Cave does not have bare walls. Everywhere the walls and other formations are encrusted with these fern-like calcite crystals (Photo: Garfield Krige)

It may appear like a lot of reading is involved, but, like a regular visitor to our site commented, it is worth taking the time to read through it, as it is always interesting to learn about something new. To quote Socrates, that ancient Greek philosopher (469/470-399BC): "Wisdom begins in wonder" – and I could not agree more; if we wonder, we read and if we read, we learn! For me it is a blessing to live here and to learn about new plants, animals and the many other things on our Estate all the time.

Our eagle chick (juvenile, really!), Little Wing, can still sometimes be seen on either the tree nearby where the old nest used to be, or else on the roof of a nearby outbuilding, but for most of the day it is now off hunting and exploring the skies. The last time I saw Henrietta was mid-January when she brought her big baby something to eat. I just hope they will keep on returning to our Estate and that they will find another suitable nesting site!

Just when I thought we haven't seen too many snakes this summer, Garfield warned me not to go and pick fresh roses, as is my habit late afternoon. We had a visit of the

brotherhood of rinkhals – just next to my rose bed! What can I say… they seem to like SCE129!

Rinkhals (Photo Garfield Krige, using his Samsung Cellphone!)

Of the many interesting and beautiful plant species found on the Estate, there is one I want to tell you about this month. It is the *Hypoxis* species, (at least four of which have been identified on the Estate) and in particular the *Hypoxis hemerocallidea*. This interesting plant with its beautiful yellow star-like shaped flowers that appears early in spring and often continues flowering into summer, is found all over in the veld. What is so interesting about this plant? Well, it is also known as the African Potato and has some interesting medicinal properties! It is also known as the star flower or yellow star and the Zulu name is iNkomfe.

Star flower *Hypoxis hemerocallidea* (Photo Elmarie Krige)

According to the South African National Biodiversity Institute the name “African Potato”, is incorrect as it has a corm - a compressed underground stem developing vertically and not a tuber, which is a swollen stem as in the case of the potato, which develops horizontally. However, for most people, this is how it is known.

Although this lovely plant is not listed as endangered or threatened, the open grasslands in our country are under huge pressure due to urban sprawl, so in time its habitat may become threatened. Studies have shown it to be the most traded plant at muti markets in the Eastern Cape; so indiscriminate digging up of the plant can also ultimately endanger its existence. It is also a very hardy plant, which benefits from fire (where fire is part of the ecological regime). The fibres protect the corm from fire and fire stimulates the growth of new leaves and seeds are stimulated by fire.

It has been used in traditional medicines for centuries, and is probably the best known muti plant in the country. Parts of the plant are used by traditional healers in infusions and concoctions to treat a variety of ailments - from cancer and tuberculosis to urinary tract infections and testicular tumours. It is also used as a laxative to get rid of intestinal worms. It is apparently also used in treating anxiety, depression, rheumatoid arthritis as well as in the treatment of HIV/Aids.

There is no doubt that it does have certain immune-building properties, and studies found that a phytochemical derived from *Hypoxis* is hypoxoside. This is an inactive compound, which can be converted to rooperol, which has potent pharmacological

properties relevant to the treatment of cancer, inflammations and HIV. Extracts from *H. hemerocallidea* are also effective in the treatment of the urinary system. However in its raw form it can be toxic to human beings!

Studies in 2005 found that the use of the African potato may actually inhibit the effectiveness of antiretroviral drugs. Researchers warned that extreme caution should be taken in treating HIV patients with any herbal drugs. They stressed that there could be poisonous drug interactions; treatment failure and the HIV strain could even become resistant to antiretroviral drugs. For more reading about this research and the findings of this study, click on this link:
http://www.akita.co.za/mnp/africanpotato.htm

I just find it so interesting that this pretty little flower seem to have all kinds of immune-building qualities. I love seeing them all over in the veld at springtime. With time and more research we will probably be surprised at what this plant can offer. But remember, rather than trying to make you own medication, speak to a doctor for the correct treatment for whatever ailments you might have!

Another hypoxis species found on our Estate - *Hypoxis interjecta* (Photo Elmarie Krige)

Until next month, Sterkfontein greetings to all!

Just for fun, some hilarious Valentine's Day quotes:
"Today is Valentine's Day. Or, as men would like to call it, Extortion Day!" Jay Leno – American comedian.

“I don’t understand why Cupid was chosen to represent Valentine’s Day. When I think of romance, the last thing on my mind is a short, chubby toddler coming at me with a weapon.” Anon

---

Goeie dag aan al die Celtis vriende! Februarie is die kortste maand en natuurlik ook die sogenaamde maand van die liefde - vir die wat hou van die pret wat met Valentyns Dag gepaard gaan! Sover het ons maar min reën op die Estate self gekry, en dit wat geval het, was min en so sporadies, dat baie van die veldblomme glad nie eintlik geblom het nie. As ek vergelyk met vorige jare se reënval en foto’s, was daar massas *ipomoeas* (ons eie, inheemse morning glory – moet asb nie verwar met die pers indringerplant nie, kyk na "Invasives" op die webwerf om seker te maak of ‘n plant ‘n indringer is al dan nie) en ander kleurryke blomme oral. Die jaar is daar egter maar min verskeidenheid te siene.

Turbina oblongata **(Foto: Elmarie Krige)**

Ek is baie opgewonde oor die nuwe bladsy oor grotte, (**Caves**) op ons webwerf (http://sterkfonteincountryestates.org.za/caves)! Ek dink Garfield het ‘n baie goeie stuk geskryf en die foto’s wat hy uitgesoek het is van die beste – en ek sê dit nie net omdat hy my man is nie, ons het alreeds heelwat komplimente oor die bladsy gekry! Soveel so, dat selfs die *Speleological Exploration Club* dit net so op hul eie webwerf (http://www.sec-caving.co.za), met ons goedkeuring natuurlik, geplaas het, sowel as ‘n skakel na ons webwerf! Natuurlik kan die foto’s nie regtig reg laat geskied aan hoe wondermooi sommige van die grotte binne-in is nie, maar ek sou dink “job well done”!

Wind Gat Grot (Foto: Garfield Krige)

‘n Gereelde besoeker aan ons webwerf het juis genoem dat hy altyd iets nuuts leer as hy bietjie daarop rondloer. Om Socrates (469/470-399BC), daardie antieke Griekse wysgeer, aan te haal: “Wisdom begins in wonder” en ek kan dit nie beter stel nie; om oor iets te wonder lees mens na, en hoe meer mens lees, hoe meer bekom mens kennis. Vir my is nog altyd lekker om iets nuuts oor dinge wat hier voorkom te leer. So loer gerus na die bladsy en geniet!

Little Wing, ons arendkuiken (eintlik seker “tiener”!), kan nog gereeld gesien word op die nok van ‘n buitegebou of gunstelingboom naby waar die nes eers was. Meeste van die tyd is hy/sy nou besig om heerlik in die lug rond te sweef op soek na prooi, of sommer net vir die lekkerte daarvan. Henrietta het ek so middel Januarie laas gesien toe sy aan haar yslike groot “baba” ‘n happie gebring het. Ek hoop maar die ouerpaar sal bly terugkeer om nes te maak op ons Estate.

Ek dag nogals die somer is ons gereelde besoeke van die slangfamilie gespaar, maar net gistermiddag sê Garfield ek moet liefs nie vars rose vir die huis gaan pluk soos my laatmiddag gewoonte is nie. Reg langs my roostuin lê toe ‘n knewel van ‘n rinkhals en rus! Lyk my die ouens hou maar van SCE129!

Rinkhals (Foto: Garfield Krige. Geneem met sy Samsung selfoon!)

Van al die mooi en interessante plante wat op ons Estate voorkom, wil ek graag die maand skryf oor die *Hypoxis* spesies, (waarvan ten minste vier op ons Estate geïdentifiseer is) maar spesifiek oor die *Hypoxis hemerocallidea*. Die plant met sy heldergeel blomme kondig elke jaar die lente aan en blom soms tot in die somer en mens sien hul oral in ons veld. Nou wat is so interessant aan die plant? Wel, dis ook bekend as die Afrika patat of Afrika aartappel en hierdie, mens wil amper sê, wonderplant, beskik oor heelwat medisinale eienskappe! Die plant is ook bekend as die sterblom en die Zulunaam is iNkomfe.

Gifbol *Hypoxis hemerocallidea* (Foto: Elmarie Krige)

Volgens die Suid Afrikaanse Nasionale Biodiversiteitsinstituut, is die naam “Afrika aartappel” heeltemal verkeerd aangesien die plant ‘n kormus het. Dit is ‘n saamgeperste stam wat vertikaal ontwikkel teenoor die aartappel wat ‘n knol vorm vanaf ‘n geswolle stam, en dit het ‘n horisontale groeiwyse het. Maar in die volksmond sal dit seker maar die Afrika aartappel bly.

Hoewel die plant nêrens as bedreigd gelys is nie, is daar hoë impak op ons graslande as gevolg van verstedeliking van oop areas, gevolglik kan die plant se habitat met tyd baie bedreig word. Studies het ook gewys dat dit die mees verkwanselde plant is op Oos Kaapse muti markte, so, die voor die voet uitgrou van die plant kan natuurlik ook ly tot die moontlike uitwissing daarvan. Waar vuur (voorbrande) op ‘n ekologies-beheerde manier gebruik word, strek dit tot voordeel van hierdie geharde plant. Die vesels beskerm die kormus teen vuurskade en vuur bevorder nuwe blaargroei en stimuleer ook saadontwikkeling.

Die plant word al vir eeue deur tradisionele genesers gebruik en is bes moontlik die bekendste muti plant in ons land. Dele van die plant word deur tradisionele genesers in aftreksels en allerhande konkoksies gebruik vir allerhande skete en kwale. Van kanker en tuberkulose tot urienweginfeksies en selfs testikulêre vergroeisels, sal glo baat vind by gebruik van die medikasie! Dit word ook as purgeermiddel gebruik om van ingewandswurms ontslae te raak en word ook as middel teen angstigheid en neerslagtigheid, rumatiek en selfs as behandeling vir HIV/Vigs gebruik.

Dat dit wel oor immuniteitsvervaardigingseienskappe beskik, is nie te betwyfel nie. Studies het bevind dat ‘n chemiese eienskap wat van die plant onttrek word hypoxoside is. Hierdie onaktiewe stof kan verwerk word in rooperol wat oor baie sterk immuniteitsvervaardigingseienskappe beskik. Hierdie sterk farmakologiese eienskap is toepaslik in die behandeling van kanker, inflammasie en HIV. Daar is ook gevind dat aftreksels van *H. hemerocallidea* effektief is in die behandeling van die urinêre sisteem. Maar daar is ook bevind dat dit in die rou, onverwerkte vorm baie giftig vir die mens is - daarom ook die ander Afrikaanse naam, Gifbol!

Studies in 2005 het egter bevind dat die gebruik van die Afrika aartappel in werklikheid die doeltreffende werking van antiretrovirale middels kan teenwerk! Navorsers se bevindinge waarsku ten sterkste teen die gebruik van enige kruiemiddels in die behandeling van Vigs pasiënte. Die gebruik van sulke middels tesame met antiretrovirale medikasie kan lei tot toksiese interaksies! Daar kan selfs mislukking in die behandeling van die siektetoestand voorkom en daar kan selfs ‘n weerstand teen antiretrovirale middels opgebou word. Om meer oor die volledige, en interessante bevindinge van die studiegroep te lees, gaan gerus na hierdie skakel: http://www.akita.co.za/mnp/africanpotato.htm

Vir my is dit net ‘n pragtige vrolike lenteblom; dat dit ook nog oor allerhande immuun-opbouende eienskappe beskik, is vir my baie interessant. Ek glo met tyd en verdere navorsing van die plant mag daar nog baie dinge ontdek word. Moet nou nie probeer om jou eie medisyne te maak nie, praat liewer met jou dokter oor jou kwale - ek is seker hy sal die regte behandeling kan voorskryf!

Nog twee soorte Hypoxis wat hier voorkom. Links, *H. Indifolia* en regs, *H. Rigiduluata* (kaffertulp) (Foto: Elmarie Krige)

Vir die snaaksigheid, so met Valentynsmaand saam:
'n Ou het vir sy vrou 'n pragtige diamantring vir Valentynsdag gekoop. 'n Vriend vra toe: "Ek dog sy wou een van daai nuwe 4X4's gehad het?"
"Sy wou – maar waar koop mens 'n nagemaakte 4X4?"

Tot volgende maand groet ek – ek hoop julle het my brief geniet!

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

References/Bronnelys: www.plantzafrica.com; Field guide to the Wild Flowers of the Highveld – Van Wyk, B; Malan, S; www.hst.org.za