

Celtis africana

Sterkfontein Country Estate January 2019

Greetings fellow Sterkfontein people!

A belated prosperous 2019 to all of you and I hope it will be a wonderful year with enough rain and all kinds of "lekker" things happening for everyone! Sometimes something interesting happens and that prompts me to do another *Celtis*, so here we go!

Can dassies climb trees? Absolutely they can – and very well too! Probably everyone knows the rock hyrax (*Procavia capensis*) as a dassie, but for the sake of correctness, I will stay with its proper name.

Tuesday (the 8th) I was outside and suddenly heard the fiscal going absolutely berserk with its buzzing, warning sound. Often when the dogs or us walk in the area of its nest, it will sound its warning call but I have NEVER heard it go on like this. So, thinking it might be a snake, I quickly called Garfield to come and see what was going on.

He could not see anything under the karee but when he looked up, there was this little chubby oke looking down on him! What a surprise little visitor! I am used to seeing them on rocks in the sun, so of course I had to go and check out the facts of it and so learned a lot of interesting things about them.



Rock Hyrax - look at its beautiful bright eyes



Look at its interesting toes

The rock hyrax's closest living relative is the elephant – now this one I knew from childhood days and this fact always fascinated me - this huge animal related to this little guy! But the scientists found similarities in the structure of their feet and teeth and DNA testing proofed them to be related.

They have a set of long pointed upper incisors reminiscent of an elephant's tusks. Rock Hyrax feed on a wide variety of plants, but has also been reported to feed on insects and grubs. They don't need a lot of water as they get most of the moisture they need from the plants they eat.

In Africa leopards, Egyptian cobras, puff adders, rock pythons, caracals, wild dogs, hawks, and owls prey on hyraxes. The Verreaux's eagle (also known as the Black Eagle) is a specialist hunter of this little mammal.

They typically give birth to between two and four young and the gestation period is 6-7 months. This is quite long considering their size. Then again, think about their relation, the elephant - their gestation period is about two years! Wow, and we complain about our nine months' pregnancies - I'd rather be a human being than an elephant! The young are born with eyes fully open and complete pelage. They can digest solids after two weeks and are weaned at ten weeks.

The rock hyrax has 4 toes on the front feet and 3 toes on the hind-feet. The toes all have nails, except the inner toe of the hind-foot, which has a curved claw used for grooming. The naked, thick-skinned soles of the feet are padded with glandular tissue, which keeps

the surface permanently moist to increase traction. This enables it to negotiate steep or smooth rock faces or to climb trees with agility.

We still can't figure out why it chose to come to our property, as we don't have rocky cliffs. It might be that it was looking for food as we had this severe heat and drought up to now. Then again, nearby, next to the Rietspruit there are rocky cliffs, so maybe it just strayed – who knows! Despite the heavy winds and rain of Tuesday night, the next morning the little one was still in the tree, just changing its position every now and then.

They can become problematic animals, but according to research, diseases combined with drought regularly curb their overpopulation. So we will let the little one be, it is welcome on our property as are all other wild animals!

The other morning on an early morning walk, I suddenly spotted this spider right next to the pathway. Luckily Garfield had his cell phone with him so he could take a few photos. This is of course the baboon spider, the African tarantula. This large hairy "monster" is actually harmless to humans, they can produce a painful bite, but it causes no systemic symptoms. In other words you won't need to call the undertaker after having been bitten! Encounters with them are rare as they rarely come into houses and prefer natural habitat.



Baboon spider

Baboon spiders feed on anything they can kill such as insects and other invertebrates (beetles, grasshoppers, crickets, millipedes and scorpions. Sometimes they take the

occasional gecko or even rodents. They are the prey for a range of animals like lizards, mongooses and birds.

I think why they appears to be so scary, is their defense mechanism combined with their size. When they feel threatened they will raise their front legs and body and strike aggressively. Some species can produce a hissing sound – now imagine an upright, hissing spider of their size – man, of course I will run!

After the rain of course other creepy crawlies come out. When Garfield checked the water meter the other day, he found this little brown house snake having just shed its skin. Completely harmless to human beings so he left it to be. Just beware when walking on your property, summer is snake-time!



Brown house snake

Do yourselves a favour and Google or read up more on these interesting animals, I always just give **some** interesting facts otherwise the *Celtis* would be way too long and there are lots of interesting facts all over on the internet!



Brown house snake next to its old skin

And as 2019 is election year, how about something just for fun:

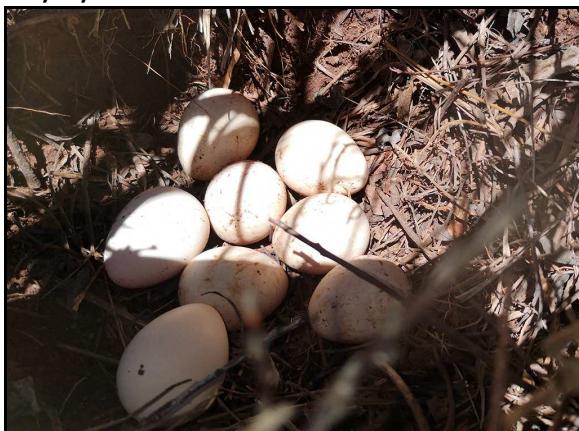
Politicians and diapers have one thing in common: they should be changed regularly - and for the same reason!



04/01/2019



08/01/2019



09/01/2019



10/01/2019

First there were four, then 6, then 8 and latest count is 9 - when will they stop! Every time we visit the nest there are more. Guinea fowl nest.

Elke keer wat ons die tarentaalnes besoek is daar meer eiers. Hoeveel nog gaan kom weet ons nie! Ons kan nie wag vir die gespikkeld bondeltjies om die wêreld vol te hol nie.

Goeie dag Sterkfonteiners!

Ek is bietjie laat maar ek hoop 2019 gaan bakgat wees met genoeg reën en allerhande ander lekker dinge vir almal. Somtyds gebeur iets snaaks of interessants en dit spoor my weer aan om 'n *Celtis* te doen, so hier gaan ons!

Kan dassie boomklim? Verseker – en sommer goed ook! Ek dink meeste mense ken die diertjies as dassies, of klipdassies, maar hul wetenskaplike naam is eintlik *Procavia capensis*.

Dinsdag (die 8e) is ek buite en hoor skielik die laksman verskriklik tekere gaan. Gewoonlik gons hulle hul waarskuwingsklanke as ons of ons troeteldiere naby die nes beweeg maar die een het so lank luidkeels tekere gegaan, dat ek vir Garfield nadergeroep het – net ingeval dit 'n slang is en ek is mos maar versigtig vir die knape.



Dassie - Kyk na die skerp voortande

Hy het oral onder die karee gesoek maar kon niks sien maar toe hy opkyk loer die pokkeltjie met sy blink ogies vir hom deur die blare! Wat 'n verassing was dit nou om die besoekertjie in ons tuin te kry! Ek het sommer dadelik bietjie kom oplees oor hulle.

Nou die dassie (in Engels bekend as die Rock Hyrax) se naaste lewende familie is die olifant – die weet ek al van kindsbeen af en dit het my altyd gefassineer – dat die reusedier familie van hierdie klein outjie kan wees! Wetenskaplikes het egter ooreenkoms met die struktuur van hul tande asook die van hul pote gevind en DNA toetse het die feit bewys.

Dassies het 'n stel lang skerp, gepunte botande – dit herinner mens dadelik aan 'n olifant se tande. Hul dieet is meestal plantaardig van aard maar hulle is al gesien smul aan insekte en wurms. Dassies drink nie baie water want hul kry meeste van die vog wat hul nodig het uit die plante wat hul eet.

Hier in Afrika is hul vyande luiperds, Egiptiese kobras, luislange, rooikatte, wilde honde, valke en uile. Die Verreaux's arend of beter bekend as die witkruisarend is veral 'n spesialis-jagter van hierdie soogdiertjie.

Dassies het gewoonlik 2-4 kleintjies en hulle is dragtig vir tussen 6 en 7 maande. Dis nogal lank gegewe hul grootte. Maar as mens weer dink- die olifant (hul naaste familie) is amper twee jaar dragtig ! Genade, ons mense kan nie kla oor ons nege maande swangerskappe nie – ek dink ek is maar liewers 'n mensekind as 'n olifant in die geval! Die kleintjies word met hul oë heeltemal oop gebore en kompleet met pelsjassie en al. Twee weke na geboorte eet hul al kos en word so by tien weke gespeen.



Hallo daar!

Dassies het 4 tone aan elke voorpoot en 3 aan elke agterpoot. Daar is naels aan elke toon behalwe die binneste toon aan die agterpoot – daar is 'n krom klou waarmee hul hulself kan krap en mooimaak. Hul dik voetsole is kaal en is gekussing met 'n klier wat permanent 'n afskeiding afgee. Dit veroorsaak dat hul met gemak oor klippe, gladde oppervlaktes, steil rotse en ook teen bome kan klim sonder sukkel.

Ons probeer nog verstaan waarom op aarde die outjie kom kuier het – ons het nie huisrotskoppies of kranse op ons plot nie. Maar met die afgelope droogte en verskriklike hitte wat als verskroei het, het hy dalk kom kos soek – wie sal weet! Nie te ver van hier, by die Rietspruit is daar darem heelwat kranse so dalk het die outjie net bietjie afgedwaal. En ten spyte van die erge wind en ook reën Dinsdagnag, was die pokkeltjie steeds in die boom die volgende dag.

Dassies kan nogal problematiese diertjies word, maar volgens navorsing word hul getalle in die natuur tog beperk as gevolg van siektes gekombineerd met droogtetoestande. Ons los die outjie maar uit, hy is meer as welkom op ons plot net soos elke ander wilde diertjie wat hier voorkom!

Nou een oggend toe ons vroeg om die plot stap sien ek skielik die harige meneer reg langs die paadjie. Gelukkig het Garfield sy selfoon byderhand gehad en kon hy 'n paar foto's neem. Dis toe natuurlik 'n bobbejaanspinnekop – Afrika se tarantula. Hierdie harige "monster" is eintlik onskadelik vir mense – hulle kan wel seer byt maar jy sal darem nie AVBOB moet in die hande kry na so byt nie. Dis min wat mens met hulle te doen kry want hul kom nie huis in huise en verkies hul natuurlike habitat.



Bobbejaanspinnekop

Bobbejaanspinnekoppe sal enigets eet wat hul in staat is om dood te kan maak. Van insekte soos torre en sprinkane, krieke, honderdpote en skerpioene tot selfs geitjies en knaagdiere. Op hul beurt is hulle weer kos vir akkedisse, meerkatte en voëls.

Ek dink hoekom hul so vreesaanjaend is, is natuurlik hoe hul lyk en dan ook hoe hul verdedigingsmeganisme werk tesame met hul grootte. As hul bedreig voel, sal hulle hul hele bolyf en pote aggressief lig en kap na die vyand. Sommige spesies kan 'n sisgeluid maak – so dink nou vir jouself: 'n halfregop, harige, agtpotige monster wat vir jou sis – ek sal nie wag om te kyk wat hy kan doen nie, dis verseker!

Na die lekker reën is dit ook tyd vir ander kriewelende, seilende gediertes om hul verskyning te maak. Nou die dag het Garfield 'n watermeter gaan lees en toe is die bruin huisslangetjie in die gat – lyk sommer splinternuut na dit vervel het. Totaal onskadelik vir die mens, so hy het ta maar gelos om sy lê te lê. Maar wees maar versigtig deesdae en kyk waar jy trap – somer is maar slangtyd!



Bruin Huisslang met sy ou vel regs van hom

Nou-ja met die verkiesing die jaar - iets om oor na te dink:

Elections are when people find out what politicians stand for and politicians find out what people will fall for. - Alfred E. Neuman

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

Bronnelys/Acknowledgements: Sanbi; Wikipedia; Krugerpark.co.za; Wild about Johannesburg- Duncan Butchard

