

Celtis africana

Sterkfontein Country Estate

March/Maart 2020

Good day all!

Wow, did I receive some interesting photos from other residents lately! I Just had to share with all of you and as we are under lockdown because of the dreaded Covid-19 virus, I decided to push other things aside and do another Celtis letter. But before I go on, thanks so much for the nice Whats-apps and emails on the previous letter - it is always much appreciated!

Some years ago, (in 2005 to be precise) Garfield took a photo of two Flap Neck Chameleons while they were busy mating (on the website under [Reptiles and Amphibians](#)) and on another day, he took a photo of a teeny-weeny one that probably just hatched.

Then last week, Jenny and Rob (SCE126) sent me these amazing pictures of a pregnant female chameleon (check out that big, fat belly!) and also one where she is digging a hole in which to lay her eggs. These have got to be just the ***most amazing*** photos ***ever!*** There are always interesting things around, one can't be bored for long living out here!



A very pregnant chameleon (Photo: Jenny Johnson SCE126)

Jenny and Rob are such amazing people – they were the ones who, years ago went all the way to Pretoria to get thrips to try and see if a colony of them could be established on the Estate. These thrips were imported to try and kill the dreaded pom-pom weeds, which is a huge problem all over South Africa. Unfortunately it did not work, but for them to have spent their own time and money to try and find a solution is really something!

Adriaan (SCE116) sent me a photo of a young mountain (or leopard) tortoise he found wondering on Malmani road. Thank goodness he saw it before it could perhaps be run over by a car or be killed by dogs. He safely released it in an open area on the Estate. Luckily he also believes it is not something to be caged but left in the wild as it is intended to be. I would like to add this as found on the SANBI (South African National Biodiversity Institute) website:

“The attractively marked leopard tortoise is the largest species of tortoise in southern Africa. Wild leopard tortoises are usually well infested with ticks in the soft skin of the neck and upper limbs. This tortoise is the only species in the genus *Stigmochelys* and is often kept as a pet throughout the country due to its adaptability to captivity, where they breed readily. When these tortoises are transported from the Cape provinces to the northern parts of the country, they hybridise with local populations, as many escape or are released by owners who have grown tired of them.

This is a cause of major concern as genetic strains mix and the tortoises lose their identity. There is also the danger of introducing diseases to local populations, which may become exterminated because they are not resistant to the pathogens. Being relatively long-lived animals, they can reach an age of up to 100 years under normal conditions. In captivity they may live for 30 to 75 years. Please do not keep wild tortoises as pets as this is a thoughtless and selfish act.”

So guys, do leave them in the wild so everyone on the Estate can enjoy seeing them around – they just look better amongst wild grasses than wandering aimlessly in a cage. If you find one in the road, please take it out of harm's way and put it back into the open veld.

I have noticed before that one sees more snakes in March and April – maybe we just don't always see them when it is very hot as they also hide when there is severe heat. The other night I noticed a small snake going towards the TV-lounge and Garfield quickly took a few pictures. Maybe it just wanted to come and watch a couple of episodes of Snakes in the City! This turned out to be an Aurora House Snake (*Lamprophis aurora*) and what a beautiful little critter it is. Its venom is not dangerous to human beings.



An Aurora House Snake (Photo: Garfield Krige)

Over the weekend Garfield heard the crowned plovers going berserk near the "solar power station" (as we call it), and Indian Mynahs and other birds soon joined them in kicking up a row. When he went to see what the fuss was all about, there was this massive puffie, the biggest we have ever seen and easily at least 90cm long, definitely fully-grown. Of course he did not kill it but removed it to an area safely away from the house. But this was a real "meneer" of a puffie!



A ginormous puffie of 90cm (Photo: Garfield Krige)

Something a bit prettier is the beautiful *Habenaria caffra* orchid, which is also in bloom right now on our property. There is more information and lots of photos of all the orchids we have seen on our property on the website under Flora ([Our Orchids](#)).



***Habenaria caffra* orchid in bloom on our property (Photo: Garfield Krige SCE129)**

Other recent sightings include a scorpion, more chameleons, the cute little common river frog, all the lovely flowers in bloom right now, beautiful butterflies (there are hundreds around!) and scrub hares and always, always my favourite mammals, the yellow mongoose.



An early morning visitor on our stoep - Scrub Hare (Photo: Garfield Krige)



A Small Marbled Elf (*Eretis umbra umbra*) in the veld - with a mantis staking it in the background! (Photo: Garfield Krige)



A Highveld Lesser-Thicktail scorpion (*Uroplectes triangulifer*) (a likely ID, not 100% sure). A mildly venomous scorpion that reaches a maximum length of 5 cm (from head to the tip of its tail)



A "hamlet" of little mushrooms - after the rains there are many mushrooms of different colours everywhere (Photo: Garfield Krige)

Carina (SCE 143) sent me a photo of a – wait for it, it is a mouthful: Banded-legged Golden Orb web Spider (*Platycoides walteri*). It is amazing how camouflaged it is on the lavender bush, only coming close to it will one notice it.



A Golden Orb Web Spider (*Platycoides walteri*) (Photo: Carina Dispan SCE143)

On the subject of spiders, here are some **very** interesting facts about spiders I absolutely have to share with you guys!

- An estimated 1 million spiders live in just one acre (just under half a hectare) of land, and in the tropics this number might be closer to three million! It is estimated that a human is never more than about 3 metres away from a spider—ever!
- Spiders are absolutely vital to a healthy ecosystem; they eat harmful insects, they pollinate plants, and they also recycle dead animal and plants back into the earth. Not forgetting that they are a valuable source of food for many small mammals, fish and birds.
- Believe it or not, spiders eat **more** insects than birds and bats **combined!**
- Who knew spiders have blue blood (I thought only Royalty does, nudge-nudge, wink-wink!). In humans, oxygen is bound to haemoglobin, a molecule that contains iron and gives blood its red colour. In spiders, oxygen is bound to hemocyanin, a molecule that contains copper rather than iron.

- In some species, male spiders give dead flies to the females as presents. How cute is that? (Never thought I'd use the word "cute" when speaking about spiders!)
- Hundreds of years ago, people believed if they put spider webs on a wound, it would stop the bleeding. Scientists now **know** that silk contains Vitamin K which helps reduce bleeding!
- A spider called the Darwin bark spider creates the strongest material made by **any** living organism. Their ginormous webs can span streams, rivers and even lakes and is 10 times stronger than Kevlar!
- It is a fact that the silk in a spider's web is five times stronger than a strand of steel of the same thickness. Now this is very interesting: a web made of strands of spider silk as thick as a pencil could stop a Boeing 747 jumbo jet in flight! Scientists **still** cannot replicate the strength and elasticity of a spider's silk.
- A lesson to be learnt from spiders – some eat their webs and then re-uses them. So, if they can re-use (re-cycle and reduce in other words!) so can we!
- Moving about, a spider always has four legs touching the ground and four legs off the ground - at any given moment.

These are just **some** of hundreds of interesting facts about spiders. Not all spiders have harmful bites, so next time before you grab a shoe and smash a spider – think twice!

And, as always, a little something just for fun:

How do spiders communicate? Through the World Wide Web.

What part of a computer does a spider use? The web cam.

What did mommy spider say to baby spider? You spend too much time on the web.

Why did the spider buy a car? So he could take it out for a spin!

Folks, that's it from me for now. Take care, stay safe, and stay healthy. I can't believe people get bored staying at home because of the enforced lock-down when there is so much around us! We are so blessed with lots of space around us so grab the kids and walk around in your property and see what interesting things you can find in the veld.

Goeie dag almal!

Mense het ek nou oulike foto's gekry van inwoners op ons Estate – ek **moes** dit net deel met julle almal! So, terwyl ons nou almal met die inperking moet tuisbly, het ek besluit om ander dinge eers gou eenkant toe te skuif en weer 'n Celtis te skryf. Maar voor ek aangaan, net 'n vinnige dankie vir die gawe Whats-apps en e-posse op die vorige brief - ek waardeer dit baie!

'n Paar jaar gelede (in 2005 om presies te wees!) het Garfield foto's kon neem van verkleurmannetjies besig om te paar (op die webwerf onder [Reptiles and Amphibians](#)). 'n Ruk daarna het hy 'n piepklein enetjie kon afneem – dit het seker pas uitgebroei! En toe, laasweek kry ek epos van Jenny en Rob (SCE126) met foto's van 'n wyfie (kyk daai boepens vol eiers!) en ook waar sy 'n gat grou om haar eiers in te lê. Dis vir my van die **mees fantastiese** foto's **ooit**. Wys net, altyd iets interessants hier – mens kan nooit lank verveeld wees as mens hier woon nie.



'n Hoogswanger wyfie verkleurmannetjie op pad om haar eiers te lê (Foto: Jenny Johnson SCE126)



Die wyfie besig om 'n gaatjie vir haar eiers te grawe (Foto: Jenny Johnson SCE126)

Ek hou so van Jenny en Rob – hulle lief dit hier en was jare gelede die twee wat al die pad Pretoria to gery het om spesiale insekte te gaan haal om 'n kolonie hier te probeer vestig. Dit was insekte wat ingevoer is om die aaklike pom-pom onkruid te probeer uitroeи. Ongelukkig het die eksperiment nie geslaag maar jinne, om hul eie tyd en geld te gebruik wil gedoen wees.

Adriaan (SCE 116) het my hierdie foto van 'n jong bergskilpad gestuur wat in Malmaniweg rondgedwaal het. Gelukkig het hy dit gesien voor 'n kar dit per ongeluk kon doodry of die arme dier dalk deur honde doodgemaak sou word. Dankie tog hy glo ook hulle hoort vry in die natuur en nie êrens in 'n hok nie, so hy het haar (jip, dit was 'n wyfie) haar weer veilig in die oop veld gaan vrylaat soos dit hoort.



'n Bergskilpad op haar mooiste - vry in die natuur! (Foto: Adriaan Coetze SCE116)

Ek wil graag net hierdie stuk van SANBI (South African National Biodiversity Institute) se webwerf insluit – dis so belangrik dat mens moet besef jy doen hul 'n onguns om hul op hok te hou. Ek gaan dit nie vertaal nie, ek glo dat al die Afrikaanssprekende mense hier kan heeltemal goed Engels lees en verstaan!

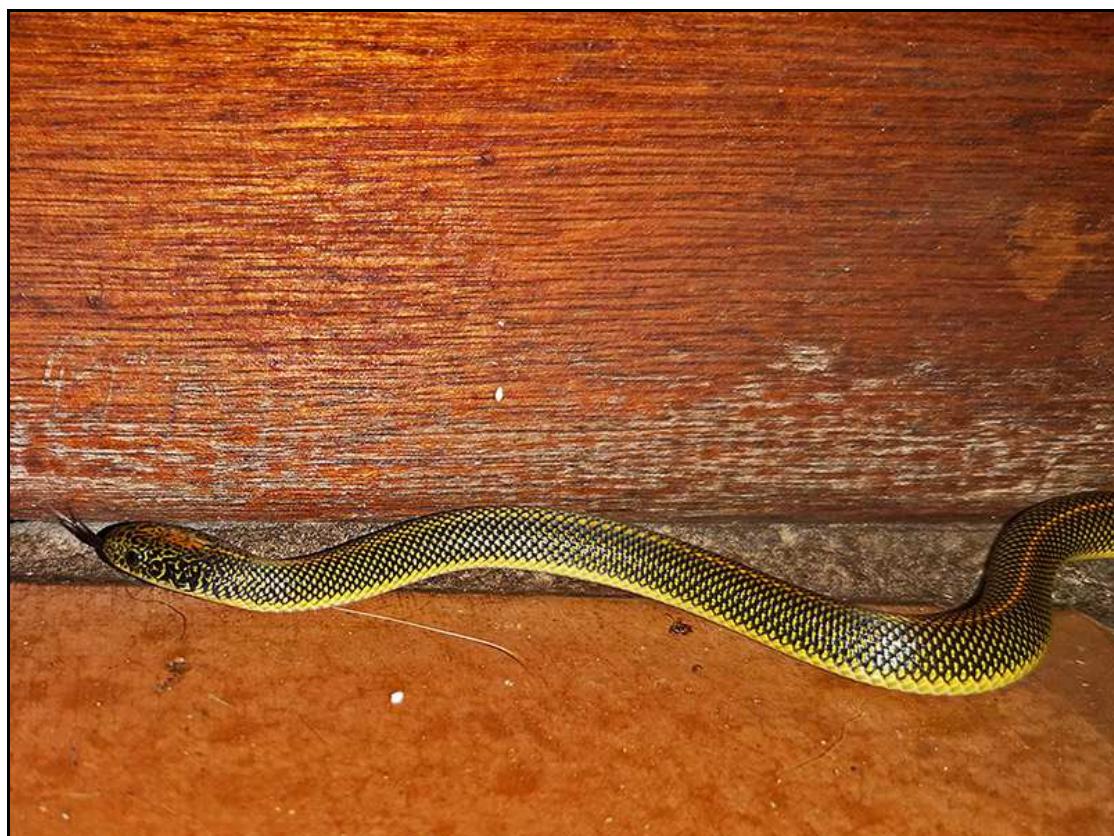
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So los tog maar die ou diertjies in die veld waar hul hoort en waar almal hier hulle kan geniet sou hul een teenkom. Hulle lyk tog mooier tussen die wilde gras as

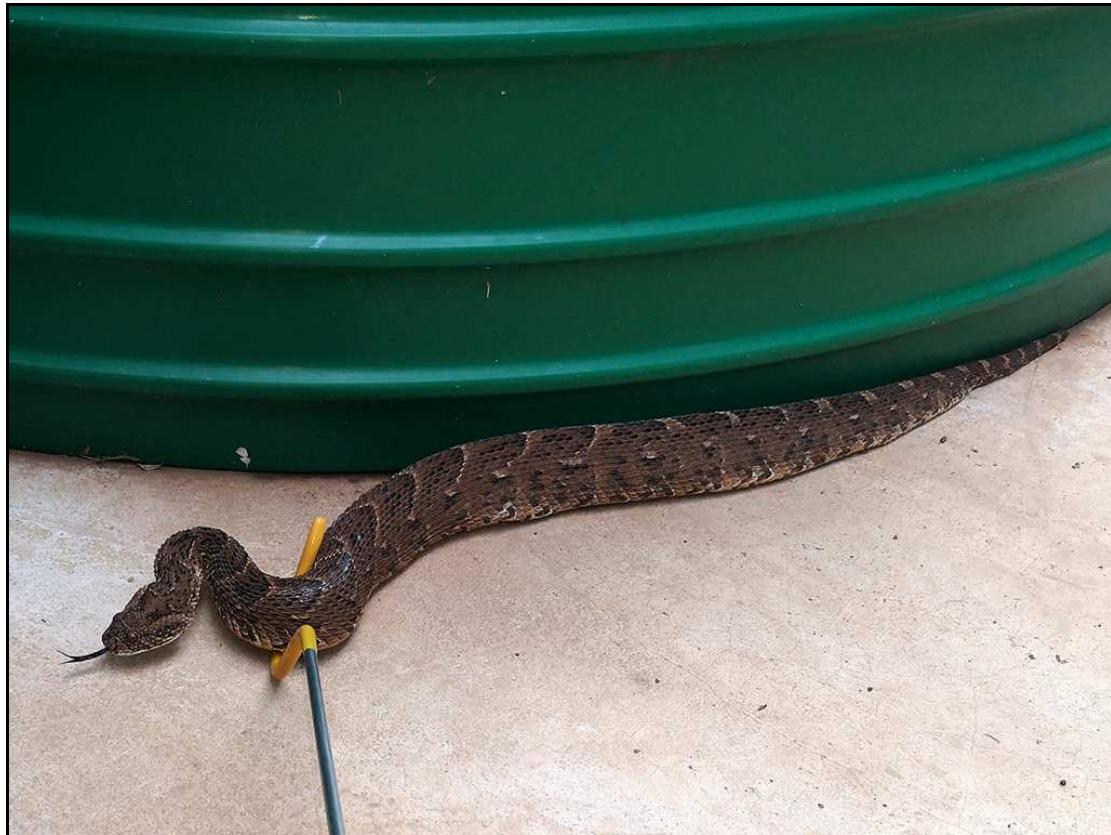
toegemaak in 'n hok waar hul doelloos om en om stap. Sou iemand dalk ene sien rondwaaal op Malmaniweg, sit hom of haar tog net asseblief veilig terug in die veld!

Ek het al voorheen opgemerk dat mens meer geneig is om slange hier in Maart/April raak te sien. Dis dalk maar omdat hulle ook skuil as dit ongenadig warm is so mens sien hul dalk meer geredelik in koeler tye. Nou een aand sien ek 'n klein slangetjie besig om na die TV kamer te seil! Garfield kon gou 'n paar foto's neem en ons kon dit identifiseer as die Aurora huisslang (*Lamprophis aurora*) – heel onskadelik vir die mens. Ek wonder nou of die outjie 'n paar episodes van Snakes in the City wou kom kyk! Dis eintlik 'n pragtige slangetjie.



'n Pragtige Aurora Huisslang (Foto: Garfield Krige)

Die naweek hoor Garfield die kroonkiewiete naby ons "sonkragstasie" (soos ons dit sommer noem) absoluut malgaan en die Indiese Mynahs en 'n spul ander voëltjies fladder ook rond op 'n kol en gaan woes tekere. Toe hy nou gaan kyk wat aangaan, is dit 'n hengse groot poffie wat daar lê. Dis nog die grootste een wat ons al raakgesien het hier, beslis uitgegroeи en maklik by die 90 cm lank. Nou-ja hier maak ons nie slange dood nie en het hy die knaap verwijder en verder van die huis af in die veld gaan loslaat. Maar dit was verseker 'n **meneer** van 'n poffie hoor!



'n Volgroeide pofadder van 90 cm (Foto: Garfield Krige)

Iets anders en darem mooier is die pragtige *Habenaria caffra* orgidee wat nou blom op ons eiendom. Julle kan meer lees en foto's sien van al die pragtige orgideë wat ons al op ons eiendom gesien blom het op die webwerf onder Flora ([Our Orchids](#)).



Habenaria caffra orgideebloem van nabu (Foto: Garfield Krige)

Ander goed wat ons onlangs hier teengekom het is 'n skerpioen, nog verkleurmannetjies, die oulike rivierpaddatjie, honderde skoenlappers en natuurlik al die mooi veldblomme wat nou blom. Natuurlik ook vlakhase en my absolute gunsteling - die rooi meerkat. Op die webwerf is hope inligting en snaaksighede van al die diertjies hier op ons Estate, so die wat lushet en hou van lees, kan gerus loer.



'n Melkboskoenlapper (Eng: African Monarch) (*Danaus chrysippus orientis*) (Foto: Garfield Krige)



Die oulike knapie het sommer op my hand geklim (Foto: Elmarie Krige)



'n Oulike Rivierpaddatjie (Foto: Elmarie Krige)

Carina (SCE 143) het vir my 'n foto van 'n spinnekop op haar laventelbos gestuur, Dis so goed gekamoefleer mens sal dit eers raaksien as mens reg by die diertjie is. En die knaap se naam is 'n hele mondvol : Gebande Goue Wawielweb spinnekop (*Platyoides walteri*).

En gepraat van spinnekoppe, hulle is eintlik regtig interessante diertjies en daar is hope feite oor hulle beskikbaar op die Internet, maar ek wou graag net hierdie paar met julle deel.

- Ongeveer 'n miljoen spinnekoppe leef in een akker (so net onder 'n halwe hektaar) grond en wetenskaplikes reken in die tropiese areas kan die getal nader aan driemiljoen wees! Kundiges reken dat 'n mens is nooit verder as 3 meter weg van 'n spinnekop is nie!
- Spinnekoppe is noodsaaklik vir 'n gesonde ekosisteem; hulle eet skadelike insekte, bestuif plante en verwerk en hersirkuleer dooie diere en plante terug in die grond in. Hul is natuurlik ook 'n belangrike voedselbron vir klein soogdierdjhies, voëls en ook visse.
- Glo dit of nie, spinnekoppe eet **meer** insekte as voëls en Vlermuise **saam**!
- Wie sou kon dink spinnekoppe het blou bloed? Ek dag altyd dis nie die koninklikes wat bloubloed het (julle weet mos!). In die mens verbind suurstof met hemoglobien, 'n molekule wat yster bevat en bloed die rooi kleur gee. In

spinnekoppe verbind die suurstof met hemosianien, 'n molekule wat koper in plaas van yster bevat en dus die blou kleur aan hul bloed gee.

- In sommige spesies bring die manlike spinnekop dooie vlieë aan die wyfie as 'n geskenkie. Is dit nou nie oulik nie? (Nooit gedink ek sal die word "oulik" gebruik as ek van spinnekoppe praat nie!)
- Honderde jare gelede het mense geglo as hul 'n web van 'n spinnekop op wonde sit, dit sal ophou bloei. Deesdae **weet** wetenskaplikes dat sy Vitamine K bevat en dit is 'n vitamine wat bloeding help stop!
- Die sogenaamde "Darwin bark spider" se sy is die sterkste materiaal wat deur enige lewende organisme vervaardig word. Die spinnekop se reusagtige webbe kan oor waterstrome, riviere en selfs mere span en is sterker as Kevlar!
- Dis 'n feit dat die sy van 'n spinnerak vyf keer sterker is as 'n staalkabel van dieselfde dikte. Nou wat nog interessanter is, is dat sou men s'n kabel so dik soos 'n potlood kon maak van spinnerak vesels , dit 'n Boeing 747 Jumbo jet kan stop terwyl dit vlieg! Wetenskaplikes kan **steeds** nie die sterkte en elastisiteit van spinnekopsy namaak nie!
- Lets wat ons nogals by spinnekoppe kan leer is hoe hul hergebruik. Daar is van hulle wat hul spinnerakke opeet en hergebruik! So as hulle kan hergebruik kan ons ook mos!
- As 'n spinnekop rondbeweeg is daar te alle tye vier van hul pote op die grond en vier in die lug.

Dis nou maar net 'n paar van die honderde interessante feite oor spinnekoppe. Nie alle spinnekoppe se gif is nadelig vir die mens nie, so volgende keer voor jy 'n skoen gryp en een vermosel, dink aan al die goeie dinge wat hulle doen!

En, soos altyd, iets net vir die grap:

Die man se aan die blondine: Seiko en Rolex is darem vreemde name vir jou twee honde – hoekom so?

Blondine: Halloooo, dis watch dogs okay?

Landros: Gatiep waar is jy gebore?

Gatiep In die Kaap djou honnor.

Landros: Watter deel?

Gatiep: My hele lyf djou honnor, net my tanne kom van Joburg

Mense, dis al van my kant af vir nou. Bly veilig en bly gesond. Ek kan nie glo mense raak rusteloos omdat ons moet tuisbly nie. Ons is so gelukkig met hope spasie om

ons, wonderlike natuur en interessante diertjies oral. Stap lekker rond op jul stukkie grond – gryp die kinders en laat hulle ook sommer iets leer oor die natuur en kyk wat julle als in die veld kan opspoor!

Bronne/References: 'n Volledige gids tot die slange van Suider-Afrika - Johan Marais; Field Guide to the Orchids of Northern South Africa - Douglas McMurtry; Factretriever; Butterflies of South Africa's National Botanical Gardens - Christopher Willis and Steve Woodall.

