

Celtis Africana

Sterkfontein Country Estate

February 2021/ Februarie 2021

Good day all!

Quite a few people have asked me what is new at our Estate and when will they be seeing a new Celtis. Remember quite a few readers don't necessarily live on the Estate. Of course there are always things going on and things to see, but the truth is I hardly touched home-base the past months so I just did not get around to doing one. But as we observed so many interesting things lately, I thought what the heck, let me just sit down and DO one!

The very best "present" I got one morning was a fantastic sighting right here in our driveway! It felt like Christmas all over! I was discussing something with Garfield in the office, and as I got up from his desk to leave, out of the corner of my eye I saw something in our driveway. For a second I thought what the heck is a big brown chicken doing in our driveway! But then looking closer I saw it was a lovely young-adult Black-chested Snake Eagle, having just caught a snake! I was so excited and almost screamed to Garfield to quickly drop everything and go and fetch his camera, while I watched in awe what played off before me!



"Two-thirds there!" Young Black-chested Snake Eagle swallowing a snake - Photo: Garfield Krige

First it trampled the snake to death as they do and then it proceeded to swallow it, taking off soon afterwards. Luckily Garfield could get a couple of shots in and I am very excited to share them with you! Someone tried to tell me this is a Brown Snake

Eagle. No ways! I have observed our eagles from chick to adulthood intimately over the years taking photos of all it's different stages of development, so I know, this is a young-adult Black-chested Snake Eagle. At the stage where this one is as a young adult, they are this tawny-brown with a sort of mottled breast, eventually turning into the typical adult colour. Also, nowhere will you find evidence of a Brown snake eagle with the distinctive stripes inside the wings, not in photos, nor in description of the species. See the photo in the Afrikaans section showing the underside of the wing.



"Burp... now *that* was nice!" - Photo: Garfield Krige

I am so happy to know that our eagles are still breeding successfully, even though maybe not on the Estate itself, but quite likely on a farm adjacent to the Estate. Regular sightings there have been reported. We also see them regularly on the hunt above our Estate, which makes me very happy to know they are still around. I guess, like I have predicted long ago, it is getting too built up and "crowded" on our Estate, so they found a more quiet nesting site. But as there is enough food around as well as a safe breeding site, it is not likely that they will just leave the area.

Speaking of snakes, my domestic worker have told me about a green snake she has seen a couple of times near her house but could not really describe it. Then just the other day our gardener was clipping the hedge near their rooms and called Garfield to go and look at a snake lying in the sun on the hedge. This beautiful specie turned out to be a Spotted Bush Snake, previously known as the Variegated Bush Snake and no, don't ask me why they always change names of animals and plants!

This is not a venomous snake but will bite easily when handled. It is usually very well camouflaged. What is very interesting about this snake is that it is a very good

climber and as it has keeled-shaped scales (like the keel of a boat), it can easily climb up a tree or even up buildings of face brick. When confronted, it will blow up the neck showing bright blue skin amongst the scales. It eats lizards, chameleons, frogs (not guttural toads) and love geckos.



Spotted Bush Snake (*Philothamnus semivariegatus*) - Photo: Garfield Krige



Common Egg-eater - on it's way to look for ... an egg? - Cell phone photo: Garfield Krige

Louis Trichardt (SCE 136) spotted the brother (or maybe sister!) of this one and I know he shared it on the Whatsapp group. Louis also found this “business card” of another snake near his back door just the other morning. Rather the business card than the real deal I would think!



"Business card" left by a snake - Cell phone photo: Louis Trichardt

With summer in full swing, I noticed a “new” plant while we were walking the dogs one morning. I have never seen this specific plant on our property, but it could have been somewhere else in the veld, us just not seeing it amongst the grasses. As we have never developed all of our property wanting to keep some of the lovely veld and wild flowers a place to flourish, it would be easy to have missed it.

I also think because we burnt our veld entirely this year, it may be the cause of them popping up in other places. If you read the lovely, almost poetic piece written by professor AE Van Wyk under *Veldfires and living in the country* on our website, you

will see that lots of plants rely on regular burning of the veld in order for their seeds to germinate.

This is the lovely *Clematis villosa*, also known by the very strange name of Wild dog (don't ask me!) or feather duster. It has sweet-smelling flowers and could be cream-coloured, white, pale pink or mauve. I do hope it will spread and that next season we might have them all over, they really are pretty!



Clematis villosa - Cell phone photo: Elmarie Krige



Tephrosia longipes one of the lovely wild flowers, blooming this time of the year - Cell phone photo: Elmarie Krige

With all the rains a lot of wild flowers are blooming profusely, and just yesterday Garfield told me of one of our orchids, the *Habenaria caffra* orchid is also in flower right now, see the photo below.



Habenaria caffra orchid nicely hidden amongst the tall grasses - Cell phone photo: Garfield Krige

Guys, I wanted to bring you some Valentines jokes seeing as we are still in the “month of love” but I could only find some very lame ones. As it is, I don’t always find funny, “non-naughty” jokes (after all this is a kid-friendly website!) to share, but here goes, as always, just for fun:

Why do we tell actors to “break a leg”? Because every play has a cast!
Yesterday I saw a guy spill all his Scrabble letters on the road. I asked him, “What’s the word on the street?”

How does a rabbi make coffee? He brews it!

I had a nightmare in which an evil witch forced me to eat a gigantic marshmallow. When I woke up my pillow was gone.

Man I **love** a good pun!

Folks, so that's all from me for now, forget a bit about politics and Covid and take a walk on your property and see if you can spot some of the flowers mentioned here or on the SCE website. They are there, believe me, they are just hidden amongst the grasses! Till a next time, it is adios from me for now!

Hallo daar mense!

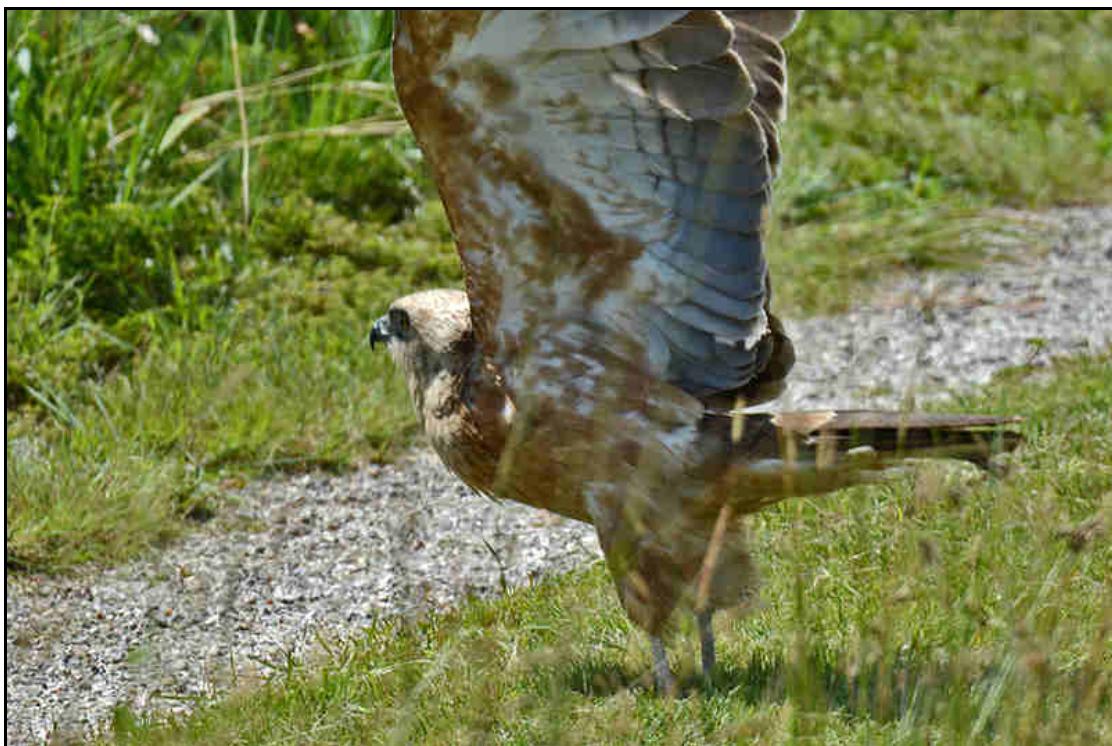
'n Hele paar mense het al gevra wanneer is daar nou weer 'n nuwe Celtis of gebeur daar dan nou niks snaaks meer op ons Estate nie. Onthou daar is 'n hele paar lesers wat nie noodwendig op ons Estate woon nie. Natuurlik is daar altyd iets interessant aan die gang of te siene, maar die feit is ek het die laaste maande skaars grondgevat wat nog te sê dink aan 'n Celtis doen. Nou-ja, na 'n paar baie interessante goed wat ons onlangs gesien en belewe het, het ek maar net myself voor my PC kom neerplak en besluit ek gaan dit nou net doen!

Onlangs een oggend het ek die mooiste verassing gekry, dit was sommer soos 'n kersgeskenk hier maande later! Ek was in die kantoor besig om iets met Garfield te bespreek en toe ek opstaan van sy lessenaar het iets uit die hoek van my oog my aandag getrek. Ek dog eers nou wat se groot, bruin hoender is nou hier in ons oprit, maar toe ek mooi kyk is dit al die tyd 'n jong Swartborsslangarend wat pas 'n slangetjie gevang het! Ek dog ek kry 'n hartaanval en jaag net vir Garfield aan om blitsig met sy kamera te kom terwyl ek die voël dophou.

En wat 'n gesig was dit nou nie! Eers trappel hy die slang dood waarna hy dit insluk om na 'n rukkie weer op te styg en weg te vlieg. Gelukkig kon Garfield vinnig 'n paar foto's neem van die gelukskoot!



Swartborsslangarend met slang - Foto: Garfield Krige



"Laat ek weg wees, daar moet nog happies êrens wees." Let op die swart strepe onder die vlerk. - Foto: Garfield Krige

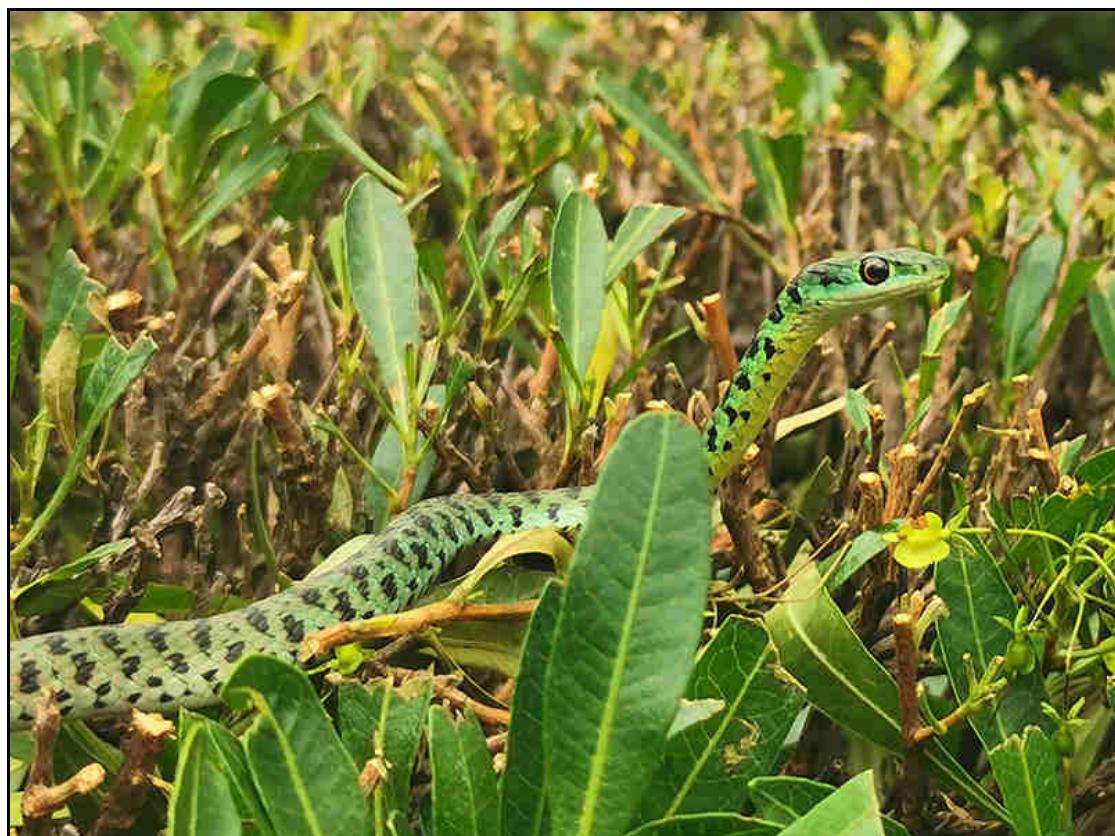
Ek is darem bly om te sien ons arende is nog suksesvol om kleintjies groot te kry. Hulle broei nie op ons Estate sover ek weet nie, maar ek glo hulle is wel op 'n plaas aangrensend; ons sien hul ook gereeld besig om te jag bokant die Estate. Ek het al lankal voorspel dat hulle dalk nie meer hier sal broei nie, daar is eenvoudig nou te veel mense wat hier bou en woel, maar ja, hul sal nie sommer die area verlaat terwyl

hier genoegsame kos is en hul gereeld genoeg 'n kuiken suksesvol groot kan maak nie.

Iemand wou my vertel dis 'n Bruin Slangarend. Aikona! Ek het die arende al soveel jare van kuiken tot volwasse arend van naby dopgehou en het tonne foto's van al die verskillende fases. Ek weet die jonges is daardie bruin kleur met die spikkels op die bors wat met tyd verkleur. Verder het ek nog nooit érens bewys gesien - hetsy van foto's of van beskrywing van 'n Bruin Slangarend wat die tipiese swart strepe onder die vlerke het nie. Hulle lyk eenvoudig nie so nie.

So gepraat van slange, my huishulp het my al vertel van 'n groen slang wat sy naby haar kamer gesien het maar kon dit nie mooi beskryf nie. Toe, nou een dag, roep die tuinjong vir Garfield na waar hy besig was om 'n heining naby hul kamers te snoei. Toe lê daar hierdie pragtige Gespikkeld Bosslang bo-op die heining! Die slang is nie giftig vir mense nie, maar lol nou met die outjie dan moet jy weet, hy is vinnig om te byt! Die slang is 'n baie goeie klimmer en met die gekielde pensskubbe (die skubbe lyk soos die kiel van 'n boot) is dit maklik vir hulle om teen die bas van 'n boom of selfs siersteenmure op te seil.

Konfronteer die meneer en hy sal sy nek opblaas en mooi helderblou vel tussen sy skubbe ontbloot. Die slang vreet meestal akkedis, verkleurmannetjies, paddas (maar nie die skurwepadda nie) en veral geitjies.



"Wat karring julle so hier by my?" Gespikkeld Bosslang (*Philothamnus semivariegatus*) - Selfoonfoto: Garfield Krige

Louis Trichardt (SCE136) het 'n rukkie na ons die ene gesien het die boetie (of dalk sussie!) van ons s'n gesien en dit op die WhatsApp groep gedeel. So dag of wat gelede het Louis 'n "besigheidskaartjie" van 'n ander meneer naby sy agterdeur gekry. Liewer die besigheidskaartjie as die meneer homself, of wat sê ek? Sien die foto in die Engelse gedeelte.

'n Dag na die arend die slang in ons oprit gevang het, het Garfield weer 'n slang naby daardie plek gesien. Dit was 'n Gewone Eiervreter, seker op soek na 'n eier om te eet.



Gewone Eiervreter naby ons braaiplek afgeneem - Selfoonfoto Garfield Krige

Met een van ons oggenstappies sien ek toe hierdie pragtige blom wat ek nog nooit voorheen hier opgemerk het nie. Die mooi blom is die *Clematis villosa*, in Afrikaans genoem die pluimbessie, pluimbossie of veerbossie. Die blom kom voor in roomkleur, wit, sagpienk of liggopers.



Clematis villosa - Selfoonfoto: Elmarie Krige

Ek dink met die wat ons die afgelope winter ons veld heeltemal afgebrand het, is dit moontlik hoekom dit spesifiek daar opgekom het. As julle op die webwerf kyk onder Veldfires and Living in the country kan julle 'n mooi, ampers poëtiese stuk lees geskryf deur Prof AE Van Wyk. Dit handel juis oor hoe nodig dit is om elke paar jaar die veld heeltemal te brand vir meeste wilde blomsade in grasland areas om te ontkiem. Wel ek hoop die enetjie sal saad oral versprei want sy ruik soet en is mooi en ek sal graag sommer klomp oral wou sien.

Na al die lieflike reën van die afgelope tyd het die veldblomme regtig oral begin blom. Garfield het juis eergister my vertel die *Habenaria caffra* orgidee het ook pas 'n blom uitgestoot. Dis altyd lekker om te sien die orgidee blom jaar na jaar steeds hier.



Habenaria caffra orgidee. Mooi versteek tussen die lang gras - Selfoonfoto: Garfield Krige



Wahlenbergia undulata - een van ons mooi veldblomme - Selfoonfoto: Elmarie Krige

Siende dit nog die sogenaamde “liefdesmaand” is, wou ek graag ‘n paar Valentysgrappe met julle deel maar ai, die wat ek kon opspoor is so droog...nee wat! Dis alreeds moeilik om “skoon” grappe wat darem snaaks is te kry – onthou hierdie is darem ‘n kindervriendelike webwerf. Maar nou-ja, hier gaan ons, soos altyd, net vir die pret:

Dis twee uur in dieoggend en die polisie keer ‘n ou omie voor en vra hom waar op aarde gaan hy daardie tyd van dieoggend heen.

Die omie antwoord: “Ek is op pad na ‘n lesing oor Drink en bestuur; die uitwerking van alkohol op die menslike liggaam, die newe-effekte van die rook van sigarette asook die nadele van laatnag kuier saam met mens se vriende”.

Uit die veld geslaan vra die polisieman “Wie op aarde gee daardie soort lesings die tyd van dieoggend?”

Omie: “My vrou!”

En sommer nog ene:

Hoekom is ‘n olifant groot, grys en verrimpeld?

Want as hy klein, wit en rond was, sou hy ‘n Disprin wees.

En laastens:

Wat het die mense gesê van die hond wat verslaaf was aan knoffel?

Sy blaf is erger as sy byt!

Nou-ja genoeg van my kant af. Vergeet so 'n bietjie van die politiek en Covid en stap gerus 'n bietjie rond op jul plotte en kyk uit vir die blomme wat ek genoem het – hulle is daar, mens moet maar net bietjie soek tussen die gras! Tot 'n volgende keer, wederom!

Verwysings/References:

Wild flowers of the Magaliesberg - Kevin Gill, Andry Engelbrecht

'n Volledige gids tot die slange van Suid Afrika - Johan Marais

