

## View From The Top

A very happy new year to all our subscribers.

Exactly 100 years ago this month the USA President regarded as the greatest conservationist in presidential history died. Theodore Roosevelt was part of a revolutionary movement to conserve natural heritage in the face of modern development. He is personally responsible for the structure of modern USA Parks management. We remember him for creating 51 bird reserves(!). This was same era (and mentality) that created the Kruger National Park. Having recently visited KNP, I cannot help but wonder if we have fulfilled the promise and visions of those great pioneers. I am gratified to say that I can see people who have become the keepers of the vision. I am sad to say that most of them are not in government anywhere in the world today.

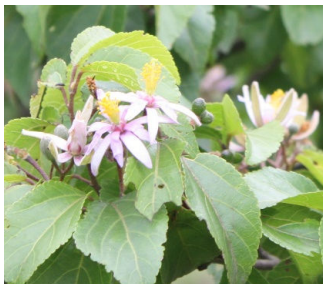
[george@naturesheart.co.za](mailto:george@naturesheart.co.za).

## Birding Plant of the Month

Cross-Berry Bush (*Grewia occidentalis*)

If you want louries (Go-away birds) and mousebirds eating a natural plant in your garden – look no further than this shrub! Plenty of berries equals plenty of bird visitors.

The plant suits a small garden and should not grow much more than 3m in height. It is frost resistant, and is also suited to full and part sun. Furthermore, it should thrive through most of the RSA. It will produce big purple flowers in spring/summer making it a really pleasing addition to your garden. As an aside, a 40mm (largish but delicate) beauty – the rufus winged flat butterfly feeds on the leaves. You may get more than great birds!



Cross-berry

## Nature's Heart

### Specials of the Month

*Nature's Heart will provide a free gift of a beaded mealworm feeder for every order of R500-00 or more, and an additional gift of an 800g pack of Suet Bits (both excluding courier fees), during the month of January 2018.*

### Bon Mots

(And since we have already mentioned Roosevelt...)

*"The things that will destroy America are prosperity-at-any-price, peace-at-any-price, safety-first instead of duty-first, the love of soft living, and the get-rich-quick theory of life. (Theodore Roosevelt)*

### Environmental Chirps

Birdlife International has a very interesting programme called the Preventing Extinctions Programme (PEP). It lists the following South African birds as critically endangered:

- White-winged Flufftail
- Taita Falcon
- Tristan Albatross
- Bearded Vulture
- Hooded Vulture
- White-backed Vulture
- White-headed Vulture
- Blue Swallow
- Damara Tern
- Wattled Crane
- Crozet Shag
- Leach's Storm
- Southern Banded Snake-Eagle

There are efforts to support these birds, and one is obviously most pleased to see successes such as the Mabula Ground Hornbill Project. (It was people such as these that have made sure that the Southern Ground Hornbill was not on this list). There are some birds (particularly remote seabirds) where, for accessibility and other reasons only experts can be called upon to support conservation. Yet the biggest shock is to see four species of vultures on the list – after all, many or even most of us have been privileged to sight all four.

One has to ask how we are able to get to a position where a bird that should actually be easy to protect is staring at extinction. There will be the normal drone of arguments; habitat, poisonings (mainly secondary poisoning), electrocution and so on.

There are many people who care for vultures, and a magnificent core who actively work for their protection. Yet these "many" are actually a small percentage of the population. As a rule the populace of South Africa are to blame because they do not care. This is a combination of apathy, greed, ignorance and predatory behaviour. It is impossible to conceive any proper solution without fundamental changes in attitude and culture. That in turn cannot happen without influence from proper government environmental leadership. Prayer may help – whilst we still have a prayer of hope.

### Bird of the Month

African Green Pigeon (*Treron calvus*)  
We photographed this fellow feeding from a strangler fig in KNP two weeks ago. The tree was a veritable hive of activity with four feeding species, but absolutely dominated by the half dozen green pigeons. These birds are very difficult to attract to your garden without favourable trees (they love wild figs). They may take fruit on your garden feeder if they happen to be in the vicinity. We are blessed at our home to have a nearby mulberry tree that does attract them, and for a month or so we have these gregarious visitors – and then they are gone. The birds are not skittish and usually offer good photo opportunities. If you are unable to get them at home the best suggestion is to look at fruit bearing trees near the large rivers in the lowveld. They always seem to be there in large numbers!

