

## View From The Top

Australia have just reported that this summer was the hottest on record. We in South Africa have had a scorching summer (may yet also prove to be a record). The result is a clear change in the natural patterns that we have become used to over the last half century. The same is to be expected from what our wildlife are used to, and we observed many animals suffering in 41°C heat at Pretoriuskop this summer. Unfortunately, the heat impacts on our water situation. As a golfer, I often feel a trifle embarrassed playing on luscious emerald fairways. We have to be more efficient. Remember, Cape Town and many other places are teetering on the edge of disaster. The situation is not helped by appalling government mismanagement (be it central, provincial or local government). The fact is that the population is rapidly expanding, and the situation will only deteriorate. This year, plan your garden in the most water effective way you can. Save where you are able.

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## Birding Plant of the Month

Sjambok Pod (*Cassia abbreviata*)  
Eventually it had to happen! Our shrub this month is suited only to non-frost areas (Pretoria and north, as well as the warmer eastern climes). Both humans and various other mammals make use of the plant, but expect particularly lories to enjoy the fruit. Barbets are likely to show interest in the seeds. The tree also attracts a variety of insects, followed by a range of insectivorous birds. The shrub has pretty yellow flowers (early summer), and create impressive pods (easily 500mm long). It is suited to medium sized gardens. Bear in mind that the tree grows quite slowly. A must if you live in a suitable region!



**Sjambok Pod**

## Nature's Heart

### Specials of the Month

Available until 29<sup>th</sup> March or while stocks last.

- 1): Peanut Treats Bulk Box (12)  
R160,00
- 2): Seed Treats Bulk Box (12)  
R160,00
- 3): Beaded Mealworm Feeders  
R50,00
- 4): Corn-on-the Cob Feeder  
R40,00
- 7): Natalie's Hand Painted  
Terracotta Fruit Bowls  
R240,00

### Bon Mots

"To be angry is to revenge the faults of others on ourselves." (Alexander Pope)

### Environmental Chirps

Would we attain the happiest State,  
That is design'd us here;  
No Joy a Rapture must create,  
No Grief beget Despair.  
No Injury fierce Anger raise,  
No Honour tempt to Pride;  
No vain Desires of empty Praise  
Must in the Soul abide.  
(Anne Kingsmill Finch)

The new financial year started with a horrible bang – my wife mugged in our driveway. The handbag and all contents stolen; cell phone, cards from four different banks, ID document, UK passport, driver's license, cash, pens, personal items, and some valuable items.

The general feeling is one of violation, mixed with a bit of relief that she was not physically harmed. The follow-on violation is when you have to deal with home affairs and traffic authorities to replace lost cards and ID documents. Thankfully the SAPS proved up to the job, and kudos to the two Brooklyn constables who got to our house within 30 minutes. The perpetrator dashed to the nearby green belt and made a clean getaway in the bush area.

There are obviously many lessons to us (some ongoing as we battle with incompetent government officials).

I have developed an alternate perspective, when contemplating the escape route. The place is prime birding country. Yet we know that you are unable to go there (certainly not alone lugging a camera), because it is overrun by skebengas, and you will get attacked. It occurs to me that this is the story of so many green belt areas. I have heard of cyclists being attacked, of unsafe bird hides, of unsafe hiking areas, of unsafe through roads.

The sad moral is that whereas we argue (justifiably) for environmentally depolluted zones, it is insufficient, and impossible to achieve without a far greater RSA cleanout – one of the heart, where morals and good ethics rule the conscience and actions of all citizens (and non-citizen residents).

We are on a terrible slope to anarchy. Damage to our country is greater than just our natural heritage. We are in the 11<sup>th</sup> hour. We have to check this and turn it around before it is really too late.

### Bird of the Month

Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*)

One of our absolute "classics". Yet these birds only started breeding in the Western Cape 100 years ago! They have now actually started breeding in the UK, and are definitely expanding range.

Just settle down, and catch them following (or perching on) a large mammal and hopping to the ground to go gobbling grasshoppers. It is as peaceful as it gets!

The great thing is that they so easy to spot and photograph. Just go to your nearest mammal reserve.

A last factoid: they may be plentiful in our local habitats, yet the Cattle Egret is capable of long distance travel, and they are known to cross the Atlantic Ocean. They are moving into areas where new agricultural activity is taking place. With an expanding world population, they are in demand!

