

View from the Top

One quarter of the year has passed! Most of those New Year resolutions have been long forgotten. It is a good time to review where we are and where we are going in the remaining part of 2019. Thinking about our garden birds, we realise that as winter arrives, our aloes will go into bloom. Many red hot poker are already flowering. This is a great time for sun birds! If you have neglected your avian friends so far it is time to make up. The sun birds are not only easy to attract into your garden, but also are wonderful birds to encourage bird watching among school going children. Perhaps it is time for an "Easter Resolution" – spend extra time on your porch in the weakening autumn/winter sun with some sustenance and a good pair of binoculars. Now that is de-stressing!

george@naturesheart.co.za

Birding Plant of the Month

Red Hot Poker (*Kniphofia praecox*)

These are perhaps the definitive indigenous plant of South Africa. Wiki lists 73 species. All are from Africa. Most of those originate in South Africa. We chose *praecox* - a Cape variant – because they are often available at your local nursery. Yet all are equally beautiful, all are equally hardy, all are regarded as "easy" to cultivate. The important point is that our sun birds love them. That is not all, our insects love them (especially bees). Indeed, they share a powerful symbiotic relationship, critical for nectar as food, and plant pollination.



Red Hot Poker

Nature's Heart

Specials of the Month

Available until 26th April or while stocks last.

1): Peanut Treats Bulk Box (12)

R160,00

2): Seed Treats Bulk Box (12)

R160,00

3): Bird Grub Suet Slabs/Balls

R18,00

4): Bird Grub Suet Bits (800g)

R65,00

5): Natalie's Hand Painted Terracotta Fruit Bowls

R240,00

Bon Mots

"Give me the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to conscience, above all liberties."
(John Milton)

Environmental Chirps

As of today, the issue of hydraulic fracturing in the Karoo is in a "holding" pattern. Precisely one year ago, Shell pulled back from their proposed developments. The reason was a simple economic issue due to the low prevailing oil price. One year later oil prices are creeping up. We should expect that the issue of fracking will resurface soon and that the Karoo will once more be under threat.

The fundamental problem is that the South African economy has been so badly abused that only a miracle can actually act to "save" it. It is easy to imagine the ANC government snatching at Karoo gas as a quick source of income. Obviously the possibility of corrupt dealings actually sweetens the option in our context. We should be prepared to understand that once the go-aheads are obtained activities will be switched on very soon thereafter. A big attraction to the technique is that it is so quick to get up and running, with comparatively very low infrastructure expense.

Unfortunately, fracking is completely unproven wrt. the long term safety of the water systems, and has actually left an alarmingly bad record in those areas where it has been exploited. We have to assume the

worst and a potential severe pollution.

That being the case most environmental organisations oppose fracking the Karoo. The Department of Environmental Affairs conducted a 2 year study of substantial scale (catch it at http://seasgd.csir.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/SGD-Scientific-Assessment-Binder1_LOW-RES_INCL-ADDENDA_2nd-Edition_05June2017.pdf). I wonder how many officials have actually read and understood the report, which in reality is disappointing because it fails to convey the risks at a level that ordinary people are able to understand (less so our particular grade of government officials). Rather it is couched in obscure language and far too much "tech speak".

The critical paragraph reads "Many of the chemicals used in SGD do not have adequate health data associated with them to make an assessment. Since the activity of fracking worldwide is relatively new in relation to the time needed to assess long-term health effects, including trans-generational effects, robust scientific evidence is scant. Some of the chemical used are known to have long-term health effects." Enough said. They have little idea of the impact. Oppose this with all your power!

Bird of the Month

Grey Crowned Crane (*Balearica regulorum*)

The best place to see crowned cranes is in the Eastern Cape and KZN Midlands and into the Drakensberg. They are most commonly seen feeding on insects in ploughed fields, but are reported to prefer higher altitude wetlands. We recently came upon a pair in a newly ploughed field at 1800m (see photograph).

Please follow the work of the International Crane Foundation (www.savingcranes.org)

