

View from the Top

What does it mean to have an environmental policy? The majority believe that it means making the "right" decisions to positively influence the conditions that prevail in the world in which we live. Actually, one would hope that that would be the effect of good policy. Policy is actually the set of principles and procedures that form the basis and guidelines to come to the decisions that define practical experiences on the ground (or in this case it really is the earth itself!) The extended use of legal process to curtail the incredible problems we have seen, (eg. mining attempts near Wakkerstroom), are indicative of policy failure, because they are either simply fall-back procedures of recourse when proper policy was not in place, or potentially where such incompetence ruled that policy was not adhered to. The Department web page has more mumbo-jumbo (and in some cases pretty words) than succinct policy. We have great hopes for Barbara Creecy. Let us see some great (and overtly publicised and adhered to) policy outcomes. george@naturesheart.co.za.

Birding Plant of the Month

Raphiolepis indica

It is not often that we will publicize a non-indigenous plant. This one comes from China, and is known as the Indian Hawthorn (ask not why!) The reason was an experience we had this month in a friend's garden. They have several shrubs (they are about 3m high). The number of insect life to be found was bogging (especially bees). The flock of birds was even more impressive – some eating the flowers, and some eating insects. They were led by spans of bulbuls, who permitted me to get to 2m simply because they were so occupied. The flowers are a really beautiful pink that enhances the experience of spring in the garden. I researched them. They grow very well in Gauteng. They are available in your local nursery. Just saying...



Indian Hawthorn

Nature's Heart

Specials of the Month

We continue the September special into October. You have to try the "Luv Bugs".

1): A Free Beaded Mealworm Feeder, with every two 500g Bulk Boxes ordered!

R276-00

2): A Super Bundle! A classic metal Mealworm Feeder, with every three 100g Sealed Packs of Luv Bugs:

R200-00

Bon Mots

I once met a man who said he had visited every exotic place from the Grand Canyon to the Great Wall, but when I questioned him closely I discovered he hadn't seen the songbirds in his own backyard. (Richard Bode)

Environmental Chirps

The annual African Bird Fair came and went this September. As always the quality was evident – super walks, excellent speakers, and best of all, great people. As always we had fun! Nevertheless, a disappointing number of feet came through (particularly on the Saturday). In truth, the weather was perfect (not generally the case in previous years), the timing is considered "right", and bearing in mind that birding is growing in South Africa, turnout was therefore a let-down. Introspection is called for – can we do better? Firstly, to the organisation – it is my view that the work was very good, and advertising adequate. Thus, not an area of particular concern. The location however is more questionable. No-one will doubt the natural beauty of, and connection between the Walter Sisulu National Botanical Gardens and the birding community. All the same, the location is a little out of the way for the broader target community (centred on northern JHB). In that sense the JHB Zoo (used for many years) was a more convenient location. This issue is a little more difficult to judge without additional data points. A more pointed question is whether or not we are getting "stale".

Despite the unquestioned quality of speakers and events, there has not been a fundamental format change through the years. My sense is that children in particular can become bored by proceedings (even considering the excellent puppet show!) It is very difficult to know if my musings are accurate. Perhaps a thought would be to move it to the Pretoria National Botanical Gardens (just as beautiful and bird friendly, but a little more accessible as a location.) We could consider jumping castles and other kids activities. An idea is to get a bird, (or more broadly fauna) themed classical concert, playing an hour each day. I would pay to see items from Carnival of the Animals, or Swan Lake etc. Even a similarly themed popular music concert could work. Think about it – listening to Rockin' Robins on a lazy birding afternoon!

Bird of the Month

*Orange-throated longclaw (*Macronyx capensis*)*

One of those very common birds that you do not commonly see in your garden. The photo below was taken in the Rietvlei Nature Reserve, where many beautiful specimens are to be found. Not surprising really – this is the definitive grassland bird, mainly hitting the smaller ground crawling insects – and Rietvlei is perfect terrain! The birds are only found in Southern Africa. To make it more interesting for those who love birds – this is the breeding season, and Rietvlei grass will be full of small nests. The fact is that they are a tough test for budding photographers, despite appearing to "pose" on small rocks from time to time, because they are so often in motion and often in shadow. If anything, that contrast and movement actually enhances the beauty of that flaming orange. A trip to Rietvlei is well advised, and thoroughly worth the effort.

