

View from the Top

Wow! I cannot really express my amazement that the Flock to Marion 2021 is actually going ahead. It requires organisation and permissions and general management that I did not believe to be credibly possible. Yet here we are. The credit has to go to the team of Birdlife, and to Mark Anderson. This required massive vision, and everyone who loves birds thanks you for your efforts. To those who have not yet booked for the (MSC) cruise, I understand that some place is still available. This is an opportunity that should not be missed. This writer has to confess that he purchased his new camera lens a full year ahead of time to allow for the necessary practise. I am that excited!
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Birding Plant of the Month

Protea Grandiceps (Red Sugar Bush)
This holiday we spent a few days at my daughter and son-in-law in Stellenbosch. They have a small protea/fynbos garden, and are inundated with sun birds, sugar birds and others. Doubtless, the nectar feeder encouraged them, but it was those plants that really pulled them in! Perhaps no plant is more closely associated with South Africa than the protea, after all, a protea is the national flower. What many do not realise is that proteas do extremely well in gardens outside the Western Cape. There is no reason to not pull sun birds into your Gauteng protea garden! And thus, the protea is plant of the month. But which protea – they seem equally good for birds, and are all beautiful. We chose grandiceps for two reasons; we love the flower, and they are available in seed form (we paid R175-00 per plant at a nursery – a little steep). Give them a shot, it is sowing time now.



Red Sugar Bush

Nature's Heart

Specials of the Month

The "all-about-suet" specials!
Available until 28th February or while stocks last.

- 1): Multipack -12 (slabs and balls) R215,00
- 2): Mega Pops (600g) Bulk (x5) R200,00
- 3): Suet Pops (300g) Bulk (x5) R120,00
- 4): 3-Pack Mini Balls R26,00
- 5): Suet bits (3kg) R200,00

Bon Mots

In celebration of our sugar birds!
"Suikerbossie ek will jou hê – wat sal jou mama daarvan sê"
(Traditional Afrikaner folk song)

Environmental Chirps

Here is a "fun" challenge – what is the most common true migratory bird in South Africa? It is pretty topical, because we have been spoiled by having a summer full of our great migrants! And the answer is... well honestly I would not know! Everyone gets excited by the well known raptors (falcons buzzards etc.) and rightly so. And with all the swallows flitting about, you know they have come from distant shores. Yet here at Nature's Heart, we concentrate on garden birds, and there are great examples that we regularly experience in our own suburban "nests". For us this year (as before!) it was the Piet-my-vrou (red-chested cuckoo) and woodland kingfisher. They are always good to spot and observe. They also share one common trait – very distinctive calls – you know they are about even when they elected to rather visit the neighbours.

The common belief is that the Piet-my-vrou is coming in from an area south of the Sahara in a band from Ghana to Sudan and down to the Congo. The typical journey is 4000km.

Conversely, the woodland kingfisher seems to prefer Central Africa. A few years ago the well-known ornithologist Warwick Tarboton and his team conducted a truly interesting experiment where they tracked a breeding pair of kingfishers to their winter locations. The pair had successfully bred with each other on more than one occasion. They were recaptured for tracker recovery when returning for another breeding season together. The female had wintered in Central African Republic, the male in South Sudan, 500km apart! Human logic suggests that they should have stayed together, but in truth breeding season was over! In this case the journey was 3500km each.

We are blessed to see them in our garden every summer. We wish they would expand the blessing, and actually breed in our back yard!

Bird of the Month

Meyer's parrot (*Poicephalus meyeri*)
The Meyer's Parrot is not that easy to spot in South Africa (yet there are populations!). In truth we have been spoiled, and we have seen them in South Africa, Namibia, Botswana and Zimbabwe. This beauty visited us at a waterhole in Hwange. The real tragedy is that this fellow is too often used as a caged bird in many parts of the world, including here in South Africa.

Inquisitive, gregarious noisy... The Meyers Parrot is one of the reasons for the garden birder to get out there and check out the many specials gifts that we have been given. In many cases one does not need to go far. There are experiences at our doorstep. But for this parrot, it is worthwhile driving a little bit further.

When you travel, it is a suggestion to research the area, and to make up a list of potential sightings (whether you are a "twitcher" or not). It really enhances the enjoyment when you get to see one of them!

