

View from the Top

Nature's Heart is officially closed to business for a period nominally until 17th April 2020. It is very likely that this will be extended beyond that point, and/or extended with some modification and relaxing of restrictions. Nature's Heart will re-open as soon as is viable, but in so doing will be cognisant not only of the commercial aspects and obvious service advantage we supply compared to fixed location retailers, but also of the underlying risks to the factory workers of Elaine's Birding and Wildlife Products. It was for that very reason that we closed the business two days before the lockdown commenced and ensured that staff would have some special benefits. If we deem necessary we will prolong closure, or will introduce limited operation to further protect employees; we are therefore not at present able to announce a new opening date.

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Birding Plant of the Month

Coral Tree (*Erythrina lysistemon*)

The very erudite among you will remember that we sang the praises of this tree in an early newsletter. Everything we said remains valid. This month we return to it for a very special reason – our very first seeds have sprouted and are nearing time for transplant to a pot! We are especially pleased because of the advertised deception, "easily propagated from seed". As our two trees have grown (now 4 years old), our observation has changed in that the tree has attracted a substantial number of sparrows and bulbuls, ostensibly to feed on the insects that the tree attracts, but also (less expectedly) simply as a very convenient tree for these small birds to roost. The primary recommendation remains the experience of those awesome red blossoms, a natural artwork!



Coral Tree

Nature's Heart

Specials of the Month

It is with no pleasure that we announce that we will not recommence monthly specials in April. We will re-evaluate in the May edition of the newsletter.

Bon Mots

Patience is a conquering virtue. The learned say that, if it not desert you, It vanquishes what force can never reach; Why answer back at every angry speech? No, learn forbearance or, I'll tell you what, You will be taught it, whether you will or not. (Geoffrey Chaucer)

Environmental Chirps

"On Sunday (26th January), China announced a nationwide ban on the sale of wildlife in markets, restaurants, and e-commerce platforms." The news was greeted with overwhelming jubilation among people around the world with an interest in animal conservation and welfare. My anger at the treatment of the pangolins (and many other) notwithstanding, my own doubts remain.

In the first place, the ban wording (in the English reports that I have read) makes me believe that it is a temporary measure designed purely for the period of the coronavirus, and will then, like the lockdowns be a thing of the past. Considering the total disregard of China for human rights, we can only imagine how low animal rights extend in their thinking. Secondly, the reasons are suspect. There may have been a health consideration. The primary reason was simply the appropriate image building for the Chinese regime – anything to deflect their share of responsibility for the establishment and dissemination of this virus. They have not (and will not) share any responsibility for what has happened. I believe the animals are merely a convenient diversion (for now).

Thirdly, there has been no acknowledgement of past wrongdoing. If China had received a serious "Damascus Road" revelation, the obvious outcome

would have been an immediate and humble apology for past offenses in their approach to wildlife abuse. None has been forthcoming. I conclude that they have never identified any fault on their own part.

Finally, I would have expected to see a proper commitment to a future process for legislation, for education, for management, for policing and for corrective actions. Nothing has been forthcoming. These approaches would have required substantial financial commitments from the Chinese Governments (again nothing).

It would really have had me rejoicing if the contrition had been formalised through a massive financial commitment to proper conservation activities in Africa – after all, this is the scene of their greatest crimes.

Bird of the Month

Blacksmith Lapwing (*Vanellus armatus*)

You may be fortunate to have these in your garden. We regularly catch them on the grass verge of our street, but the most common spot is on any one of the many golf courses in Gauteng. Indeed a common yet captivating sighting.

The name is associated with the sound supposedly resembling a blacksmith's anvil (really? – obviously I have never visited a village smithy).

They are found near water, and commonly eat insects. The most impressive characteristic is the habit (in common with other lapwings) of drawing threats away from a nest, at times by feigning injury. As any golfer will tell you, the next most impressive is the "attack as the best defence" strategy. Tough and brave and beautiful, the Blacksmith Lapwing is a worthy "bird-of-the-month".

