

View from the Top

Nature's Heart is at present closed to business due to the lockdown. We wish to announce that we will stage a partial reopening of the business from 4th May 2020. The intention is to offer bird food items only in the initial stages, and we will operate a skeleton staff to reduce virus transmission risk. It is an opportune time to thank our supporters for your trust.

Indeed, this issue comes at a sombre time in the history of South Africa. We expect widespread hardship and discomfort for some time to come. It was particularly distressing to see pets abandoned. It truly is a time for humility. It is a time for prayer, and for compassion for the suffering of so many. It is also a time for reflection, and recommitment to improving our attitude and orientation towards our animals and our environment in general. There is widespread condemnation of abuse of human and animal rights in China (rightly so).

Yet right here in this country we support dubious and harmful practises too. Our attitude to battery poultry is a good example – we can make changes to ensure better treatment by voting with our wallets (or at least what is left of them).

When it comes to our wild birds, they are not dependent on us (thankfully), except in extreme conditions. We actually encourage you to feed to enhance your own enjoyment and appreciation of these creatures. Especially now, your garden birds can be good to calm troubled spirits.

Since these are particularly trying times, I have chosen two well-known verses of scripture to quote for your contemplation this month.

"Consider how the lilies grow: They do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his glory was adorned like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, how much more will He clothe you, O you of little faith!" (Luke 12:26/28).

We wish you peace and safety in this time

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Nature's Heart

Specials of the Month

There are no special offers in May. We will re-evaluate once the businesses return to full operation.

Bon Mots

So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love. (1 Corinthians 13:13)

Environmental Chirps

This month has seen tightening of belts across South Africa (and at Nature's Heart!) It occurred that the best birding commentary on tough times came from the women in Bethulie Concentration Camp. We wrote a blog relating the story in August 2017. It is repeated here:

God of the Sparrow

Our generation does not have the exclusive experience of human destitution and horror. Just over a hundred years ago, our women and children lived through the Boer War concentration camps. Many perished, including some of my own forebears. Those women found hope in the midst of their own desperate circumstances in a well known verse of scripture – Matthew 10:29 – 10:31, that concludes "Do not be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows".

The sparrow became a symbol of hope to the concentration camp survivors, and through their insistence, the Cape Sparrow was featured in the smallest coin of the state from 1923 until (sadly) the 1c coin stopped production in 2002.

The Cape Sparrow became a symbol of hope through the Great Depression, and to every person in dire need. The spiritual message is simple – the God of the Sparrow cares for those at the bottom.

In practical terms though a physical support message is also clear, the God of the Sparrow expects help to the helpless from those who are able.

This blog celebrates our birders, who strive to do what is best for the country – the people and the environment.

Yet there is a second story. In this edition, we pay tribute to the employees of Elaine's Birding. So far they have endured a gruelling 5 weeks on lockdown, and it shows no sign of improving. We have supported them in various ways, and are committed to preventing retrenchment of any staff. In most cases lockdown has been far more stressful for them than for the typical suburban home with a garden that forms the major element of our clientele. They have endured without complaint. It is obviously incumbent upon us to maximise their safety, and we are taking measures to reduce risk. One such measure will be to not open the factory shop. This is regrettable particularly for those who live close by in Centurion. We apologise, and trust you will understand our position that this reduces interaction from outside. It also will leave us freer to operate with a severely curtailed staff complement. We therefore ask you to rather accept courier delivery until the situation in South Africa improves.

Bird of the Month

Cape Sparrow (*Passer melanurus*)

Could there be any bird this month except the Cape Sparrow? It is actually a little bigger than expected at 15cm. Yet the bird deserves to have a pair of binoculars trained upon it. Only then do you appreciate the delicate beauty in those feathers around the head and eyes. Not that this bird is "delicate". It is a great survivor, and is found throughout South Africa, being very versatile and hardy. And not that you have to zoom in to enjoy the beauty of the bird. The black head and throat band of the male are both distinctive and startling in their contrast and attractiveness. These birds are typically construed as "seed eaters". In truth they need insects, and are here seen eating Elaine's famous "Bird Grub" (insect replacement meal) with gusto. Go on, attract a breeding pair to your garden!

