

## View from the Top

Elaine's Birding (EBW) opens to "full" operation on the 1<sup>st</sup> of June. We need to qualify that production is expected at about 90% of that during the BC (before Covid) period. We have implemented measures relating to monitoring, sanitization and distancing that take time and effort. Even so, the sad reality is that it would seem to be inevitable that members of our workforce will contract the disease, considering the difficult living conditions and family environment that prevail for them. At that point we will enter a managed, yet previously unexperienced situation. We comfort ourselves in the knowledge that except for one 58 year old worker, (and members of the management team), the workers are not considered to be close to the "at risk" group. The difficulties are sure to be the case for a large number of businesses and employees throughout South Africa, who soon restart operation. We are well aware that your support keeps food in the pot for them and all their family members. We thank you for that. Bad as Covid-19 may be, we all have to eat. [george@naturesheart.co.za](mailto:george@naturesheart.co.za).

## Birding Plant of the Month

Common cabbage tree (*Cussonia spicata*)

This tree is found throughout South Africa, and will thrive in essentially all gardens, reaching 7 to 10 m. It really is both distinctive and attractive, and will not only beautify your garden, but is also reported to attract butterflies (and other insects). Naturally the birds will follow. Also, fruit is borne by mature trees, and feeds a variety of birds, including louries, mousebirds and starlings. A confession – we have never had one in a garden of any of our properties. Looking at this tree and the advantages it brings, I would have to say "mea culpa".



Common Cabbage Tree

## Nature's Heart

### Specials of the Month

*Yet again, there are no special offers in June, as we re-establish production.*

### Bon Mots

*Love does not cost anything. Kind words and deeds do not cost anything. The real beauty of the world is equal for everyone to see. (Carla Jo Masterson)*

### Environmental Chirps

*One is always concerned when you see an injured animal. Conversely, one is always filled with a warm feeling when an animal is rehabilitated and returned to a natural environment. Very often one has mixed feelings. In February, Elaine and I watched the full process of a cheetah kill resulting in the demise of a young wildebeest. The knowledge that the mother and the two 6-month old cubs needed the food only partly mitigated that hollow feeling. So, it occurs to me – is rehabilitation of a single animal an act of conservation? If we ignore the case of genuinely rare animals, it can scarcely impact at a global level. Why do we save the bulbul from that cat, and then expend energy to care for the injuries?*

*In fact, conservation is not that different to the principles associated with financial investment decisions. It begins at a strategic level. Alternatively seen this is the "top" as in top-down approach. It is at this level that government environmental agencies (should) operate, and also where Birdlife South Africa operate, creating policies and establishing principles that guide conservation. Experience has shown that this level is weak in South Africa, and is often impacted by expediency. Here it is necessary to acknowledge that Birdlife SA is not only an exception, but in our view a true guiding light.*

*Whereas the guidance is critical, those of us who care about the sustainability of the future always operate at a lower level of practical action, a level that could be described as "bottom-up". It is at this level that the practical actions leading to environmental integrity occur – volunteers clean rivers, or support threatened vultures, or*

*perform other important ventures. Yet for the majority it really is the accumulation of smaller actions that represent their contribution. It is here that we see individuals care for an injured (yet unthreatened) animal, or raise an orphan. Sometimes it means simply taking the children for a hike in the mountains. As an observation, it is also at that level that we see real education taking place. That means children (and also other adults) learning to love animals and to care for them, and for the environment in general. That education is the single most important act in the future of conservation.*

*We now have a new term "herd immunity". It is said that a 70 to 80% level of herd immunity will stop the dreaded Covid-19. Let us apply that to environmental conservation. What percentage of people should actually care before we can turn around some of our destructive actions? Upon consideration, only a "bottoms-up" approach can do that. Caring for that injured animal is an important act of conservation.*

### Bird of the Month

Cut-throat Finch (*Amadina fasciata*)

*For us, this has been the month of the cut-throat finch. We have never had these numbers in our garden before (at any of our homes). To be honest, these birds are really plentiful, so this should not really be a surprise. Also, their natural zone is the northern section of the RSA, so we are bang in the right sector. Perhaps the problem lies with our suburban environment, where we actually have less seeding grasses than what we should have.*

*Yet in observing these beauties, one always feels a little tinge of pain. Sadly, this finch is one of the most popular caged aviary birds. They are seen throughout the globe in unnatural circumstances. For us therefore, just seeing their joy as wild and free birds is a tremendous reward.*

