

View from the Top

The prospect of travelling by ship to Marion Island to see the birdlife seemed an opportunity simply too good to miss. At the very first opportunity our berth was booked and we were filled with excitement and anticipation, (and a little nervousness relating to the possibility of seasickness). Then came the shock of Covid-19, and the obvious impact on this experience. At present, it seems unlikely that the trip will take place as planned, and may be cancelled or postponed. Despite our disappointment, we again thank Birdlife South Africa for all their efforts and even just for providing this possibility. We will take up our option in the event of postponement. Some who had booked will not be able to do so. It does perhaps permit an opportunity for others to take their place on a prospective future cruise. We recommend that you consider doing so. george@naturesheart.co.za.

Birding Plant of the Month

Spekboom (*Portulacaria Afra*)

This month a "miracle" plant! Whereas the description is clearly an exaggeration, there can be no doubt as to the environmental benefits of this succulent. In your garden, it could be grown in a variety of settings, as the centre piece of a rockery, or even formed into a hedge-row. This one of those indigenous plants that simply enhances the garden whether flowering or not. Yet when they do flower, they produce pretty sprigs of pink.

For us as bird-lovers, they attract masses of insects, and these in turn "call" all the insect eaters! The leaves are human-edible, and support large numbers of animals ranging from elephants to tortoises.

To the gardener, they are extremely hardy, require little water, and propagate from simple cuttings. They should get your vote!



Spekboom

Nature's Heart

Specials of the Month

We have re-introduced our specials!

This month is the free-for-all on balls! Available until 31st August or while stocks last.

1): 100 x 100g Suet Ball Bulk Box
R870,00

2): 50 x 200g Suet Ball Bulk Box
R800,00

3): Suet Balls Multipack - 12
R200,00

4): 30 Suet Ball Bucket
R280,00

5): 3 Pack Mini Balls
R30,00

Bon Mots

"Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul
And sings the tune without the
words
And never stops at all."
Emily Dickinson

Environmental Chirps

We in South Africa all understand that we have an unmitigated disaster in progress. The country is effectively bankrupt, we have massive expenses required to fight the current pandemic, we have insolvent and incompetent SOE's that need (or rather expect) recapitalisation, we have very poor productivity due to lockdown, labour legislation etc., we have a completely destroyed tourism industry, and we have no actual plan other than simply to attempt to borrow more money and thereby postpone the inevitable. All the while the country credit rating is sliding resulting in a higher price for borrowings.

But the real tragedy is already playing out. We are seeing poverty levels increasing. Ordinary South African citizens (and other residents) are actually going to sleep hungry. The taxpayer base is completely eroded, and our scope for financial manoeuvre is less than limited.

With all of this in mind, what hope do we have to see valuable resources committed to our natural resources, and most specifically our wildlife?

We have to be realistic and confess that the answer is zero. What we should expect is that any venture that may result in the proverbial "quick buck" will be approved in this situation, irrespective of the longer-term merits of sustainability.

Thus, once more it seems that the onus of "doing what is right" will fall to dedicated individuals and NGOs. A sad note is that everyone is presently under financial pressure, both individuals and organisations. Even foreign funding sources are likely to be drying up

In this environment, we need to appeal to like-minded people to support conservation causes in whichever manner in which they are able. We are very fortunate that Birdlife South Africa has been so effective in representing the cause of our avian heritage, but for the very reasons outlined here, they too will be under pressure. Once more, Nature's Heart asks you to consider joining Birdlife South Africa, and becoming an active member in the interests of our future.

Bird of the Month

White-fronted bee-eater (*Merops bullockoides*)

People often assume that bee eaters all migrate. It is not true! In fact the bee eater that we most commonly see overflying our garden is the white-fronted bee-eater that "stays home" over winter. This year has been different. Generally, we make a fair number of trips to the Rietvlei Nature Reserve where we are normally able to observe them – spectacularly beautiful birds that somehow make you feel special and spoilt for just being in their presence. But for reasons well known, we have not been there for more than 6 months now. The white-fronted bee-eater becomes "bird-of-the-month" just because we are missing them...

