

View from the Top

And so the Covid-19 pandemic first wave coughs and splutters to its natural conclusion. Let us pray there is no "second wave". Even so, this is not a time to let up guards. We support the continued use of reasonable protective measures, including masks. Yet, conversely, we do see the destructive effects of incompetent policy, both economically and as it relates to our lifestyles, much due to government overreach. This spring we encourage you to get out and "live" once more, even while taking precautions. There was little that engendered more pathos than watching many of our aged living out their golden years in virtual prisons. Carpe diem! george@naturesheart.co.za.

Birding Plant of the Month

Pod Mahogany (*Azelia quanzensis*)
Do you live in the Lowveld or northern KZN? Do you have a large garden? This tree (also known as the "Lucky Bean") may be for you. It is a beautiful and massive tree. At age ten, I remember many happy hours climbing the neighbours' tree. My youthful recollection is of massive red-winged starling presence. In truth the flowers are attractive to insects and are followed by many of our garden birds. A word of caution – this tree can become very large! Unfortunately, the tree does not respond well to cold, and is best grown in frost free areas of the country. A charming thought is that a variety of butterflies feed on the leaves. Oh!, and hornbills eat from the pods...



Pod Mahogany

Bon Mots

Focus on remedies, not faults.
(Jack Nicholas)

Nature's Heart

Specials of the Month

The month of October will not have any specials. Sadly, production supply remains constrained for many product lines. As a result, Nature's Heart is operating on a notice period for orders from the factory of up to one week. We will resume with specials once this improves.

Environmental Chirps

We hit an all-time low with the recent news of an exotic private zoo opening in Nelspruit. Indeed, two separate questions are relevant to this announcement.

Firstly, are zoos still deserving of a place in civilised society? There is no doubt that they served a critical purpose in days gone by – either by a process of education, or later in critical research and even breeding programmes. However, we no longer live in Victorian (or even Edwardian) times. Education is far better served by modern media. How many people have seen balugas? How many have seen snow leopards? And yet there they are in vivid colour on our television screens, and accompanied by massive written and other collections of information. We simply no longer need zoos for that role. Even in the realm of scientific research, it seems that more effective and satisfactory options exist for in situ study in most cases. If we exclude fringe concepts such as petting zoos for children, the traditional zoo is becoming obsolete as an institution.

Yet an even more important question relates to the location of this new zoo. Nelspruit is the gateway to the Kruger National Park. Nelspruit sits on the banks of the Crocodile River – a superb location for the conglomeration of our Lowveld natural heritage. As South Africans, we need to be emphasising the attraction and conservation credentials of the KNP. We need to encourage both local and foreign visitors to go into the park and understand the importance of the holism that represents the vegetation, animals and geography of the KNP.

We do not need tigers and pumas in cages, either as a competing attraction, or worse yet as an alternative "example" of a post-industrial world order form of pseudo conservation.

Yet even worse is the spectre of exotic wildlife breeding purely for commercial purposes. We in South Africa are painfully aware of the various lion breeding programmes intended to feed the hunting "industry", and even the supporting terrible activities such as "canned" hunting for rich foreigners. Is there any chance that this zoo could be a front for the future canned hunting of tigers? Honestly, no-one can say, but it seems that we need to be vigilant.

Undoubtedly, some are going to tout "jobs" (and revenue) and "development", and possibly parrot on about primary school children education. We at Nature's Heart will be in opposition until we discern an actual and tangible benefit. At present we see only risks.

Bird of the Month

Chinspot Batis (*Batis molitor*)

I watched this little fellow aggressively take a large moth from a tree stump, and decided that he deserved the epitaph "bird-of-the-month" on the basis of attitude alone. Sadly, the moth "shots" were overexposed. However, the series of photographs immediately after were in reasonable focus and sharpness despite the zoom length. When I studied them more carefully, the beauty of that colouration and the delicate feathers became apparent. This is a magnificent creature. They are common, although generally more prevalent in the bushveld. You may be fortunate to see them in the eastern areas from KZN to the Limpopo River. Thankfully, we get them in Gauteng gardens!

