

## View from the Top

It is a great time of year to visit your nearest shelter and choose a Christmas gift of a lovely dog for your child. This is stated in the knowledge that you are personally committing to supporting the dog and will actually underwrite your child's pet-keeping skills. In virtually all other situations, giving a dog as a Christmas gift is a terrible plan. There is a real probability that the animal will end up as an unwanted by-product of Christmas and possibly be abandoned (or worse). A far better idea is to consider a charitable donation to your local shelter in the name of the recipient of a gift. That encompasses the true spirit of Christmas. [george@naturesheart.co.za](mailto:george@naturesheart.co.za).

## Birding Plant of the Month

Weeping Boerboon (*Schotia brachypetala*)

We end the year with a pretty unforgettable tree. Apparently, we should speak in English of the "Tree Fuchsia", but it is easy to prefer the Afrikaans version, because it really describes the weeping of nectar from the flowers. The tree is a bushveld specimen, and is not well suited to the highveld, yet may be cultivated even in the colder climes. The result is a tree that is a garden centrepiece, with masses of reddish-brown flowers. These attract hordes of birds, bees and other insects, but also monkeys and baboons (thus be careful if you need to discourage apes). A good friend has one about 20m from his patio, and we are able to attest the animal frenzy through first hand evidence! A great South African tree!



Weeping Boerboon

## Nature's Heart

### Announcement:

Please be advised that the final day for placing orders from Nature's Heart will be Friday 11<sup>th</sup> December at midnight. We will close for the Christmas holiday, and reopen on 11<sup>th</sup> January 2021 for new

orders. Nature's Heart wishes all our friends a Blessed Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

## Bon Mots

"In a democracy, someone who fails to get elected to office can always console himself with the thought that there was something not quite fair about it." (Thucydides, 411BC)

## Environmental Chirps

Throughout the world there is a movement to strive for a more "natural" lifestyle, for using natural "products", for "natural" remedies. It sounds so great that one wonders why it is that we would consider querying either the process(es) or the intention.

Is it "natural" to pursue the typical western lifestyle that we do at all? Is it natural to use a pair of binoculars (or a camera) when we view our birds? Is it natural to use an automobile upon paved roads? For that matter, is it natural to use modern medical innovations such as x-ray machines, or perhaps to use antibiotics?

I have heard people argue for electrical vehicles because they were "more natural" (somehow missing the argument that they were less damaging to the environment). I have heard people argue that vegan food was "more natural" (really?).

I have watched as persons with absolutely no underlying knowledge pontificate on areas such as 5g (somehow more "unnatural" than 3g), on transportation, energy, health and many more. There is one single missing common (not so common?) element – common sense!

We have entered a time where it is very easy to seduce large numbers of people with either the classic "fake news", or manipulations of facts, or with psychobabble, and in many cases with just blatant untruths.

Our recent history indicates that many of the problem cases are political in origin. Here we are more concerned with the nonsense that intends to influence the well-meaning animal/wildlife lover.

A good dose of cynicism is required along with a questioning mind. Double check facts, motives, background. Just because an idea

(fad?) is new does not mean that it is sound. Equally, just because an ancient human practise is so old does not make it inappropriate or harmful.

Once this filter is applied one will more clearly be able to see those cases where both long held and newer practises may be harmful and inappropriate, and we are able to concentrate on them. Good examples are quite obvious – toxic wastes, excessive use of plastics and many more. But it also highlights lesser "unnatural" practises that often are unnoticed – the way we treat battery chickens, the way we add (and hide) sugar to our foodstuffs, the unnatural way we treat our mentally disabled. (Yes Gauteng Government, I was referring to you). And in the process we will end up having a better attitude towards our wildlife, probably without the "natural" epithet.

## Bird of the Month

Ostrich (*Struthio camelus*)

It is the so-called "silly season", and so we indulge ourselves by selecting a bird-of-the-month that is about as far away from a garden bird as you may contemplate. The first factoid – it is the largest bird on earth – they come in at 150kg! Not surprisingly, they are flightless – one of about 60 flightless species of bird. A male will pair bond with a dominant female (as in our photograph of a pair with two young chicks) and they will raise chicks together. Another amazing factoid is that the blacker males will incubate the nest at night to enhance night camouflage!

The really sad truth is that our ostriches are 1 of only 2 extant species (including the Somali ostrich). 7 are extinct, 3 in comparatively recent time. There are many other extinct flightless birds, (9 species of moa, 4 species of elephant bird, 4 species of moa-nalo, a number of rails, not to mention the dodo, great auk and many others). Virtually all of these died out due to the presence of humans. Tip your hat to the ostrich – a great survivor!

