

View from the Top

I was read a rather dismissive “throw away” comment attributed to the great Jack Nicklaus. He is reported to have said that “the secret to breaking 90 is to propel the ball in a predominantly forward direction”. Obviously, success is interpreted differently depending on talent level. It occurred to me that Barbara Creecy has been minister responsible for the environment for 20 months. She was once again in the news for the recent St Lucia controversy. Well, an objective assessment is that she has propelled the ball in a predominantly forward direction, which is no mean feat in the RSA today. An external observation seems to reassure us that scientific progress is a valued advantage to the department. Sadly, the “strategic issues” still remain the same, and do not map well onto what one feels should be the issues for an environment department and ministry, to wit: Job creation, Education, Health, Fighting crime, and sustainable development. So where is the economics cluster, Education ministry, Health ministry, criminal justice system? Come to think of it, perhaps the Environment Ministry could do their jobs better than the present performance. george@naturesheart.co.za.

Birding Plant of the Month

Weeping Wattle (*Peltophorum africanum*)

Who would believe that anyone would recommend a wattle tree! Yet this particular specimen is very much a native to the bushveld and should grow just about anywhere in South Africa. The “weeping” name comes from insects that emit dripping water when feeding on tree shoots. Once established, the trees can take moderate frost, and will survive dry spells. But the tree is large, and should only be considered where your garden has ample space available. From an aesthetic perspective the tree produces lovely yellow flowers in summer. They do have a positive effect on wildlife that eat the seedpods, and on insects. Indeed, they are reportedly useful to bee-keepers due to nectar levels. A final punt – they grow quickly, and are regarded as “low maintenance”.



Weeping Wattle

Nature's Heart

Announcement:

With a sad heart we announce increases to be implemented during February 2021. These are the direct result of increased input cost to us. The average increase is about 5%. It is our policy to limit our general increases to an annual increase only – it happens at this time of year.

Bon Mots

To summarise our responsibility: “The highest heavens belong to the Lord, but the earth He has given to mankind.” (Psalm 115:16)

Environmental Chirps

I recently read an interesting article that listed how there has been a dramatic reduction in dogs destroyed in pounds in Ireland through the last year. I do not doubt the voracity of the report, and it certainly is one of those “heart warming” stories in a shocking “Covid” year. It also lists the reality that there remain far too many dogs entering pounds in Ireland each year. The reasons are many and various, and a disturbing number affected due to fireworks.

The authors failed to postulate a reason for the drop. When I checked based on the small number of sources available, I discovered that stray cat uptake in pounds also dropped dramatically in the USA in 2020, based on far larger numbers. Again, there was no reason postulated. Their dog numbers seemed similar. Having considered the limited data available, it occurred to me that lockdowns and the pandemic may explain for this phenomenon. Then I found a small confirmation in a report from the Richmond (Virginia) SPCA. Less people are apparently abandoning, and more people adopting pets for their own wellbeing. These animals are fantastic companions to elderly people, to lonely people, to those locked up under conditions of quarantine. Why has it taken a virus to discover something that was always so well known? Here we come to a discussion on companion birds. There are always mixed feelings when one observes an African Grey (one of my favourite birds) in captivity. On the one hand, they clearly deserve better – they

should fly free. Secondly, they endure terrible journeys from their traditional homes to the pet shops of the world. And thirdly, we encourage a dubious market by purchasing them. Furthermore, few people seem to understand that the bird will outlive them, and thereby create a new potential problem for the heirs. Conversely, I have observed many bird owners who love their birds and care superbly well for them. Equally importantly, I have observed the birds, and the devotion they have to their human “parents”. These birds provide all the same positive features that a dog does, especially to older people.

On balance I have moderated my opinion on the matter. If you need a companion; if you are thinking of a bird; if you are committed to their care and wellbeing; then any one of a large number of bird species would be a wonderful pet. Please buy from reputable organisations.

Bird of the Month

Reed Cormorant (*Microcarbo africanus*)

Is it a clown? Is it an acrobat? No this is the Reed Cormorant stretching out its neck! Our best sightings have been at golf courses(!), but include many rivers and dams throughout South Africa. In fact, throughout Southern Africa, and we did see a large number in the Okavango.

If one investigates the feet and notices the webbing, you realise that this will be a phenomenal swimmer, and hunter of fish. That is so, and yet our observation leads us to believe that frogs comprise an even bigger share of diet. In a way this is a bird of contrasts. Plentiful, and yet always a pleasure to see; not a beauty, and yet always photogenic. A wild bird, and yet very tolerant of human presence. Common, but special...

