

## **View from the Top**

It is a wonderful reality that birds have influenced art throughout history. (They have also influenced music, and even religious belief, but that is a subject for a different day). The oldest known artworks are rock art birds (firebirds?) at Gabarnmung dated at possibly 30000 years old, and this rock art trend continued with cave paintings into more recent time. During the high periods of ancient Egypt this was massively extended with glorious artworks of ibises, falcons, herons and domestic birds. The artworks only increased during the Greco-Roman period, and accelerated in early Christian iconography. Then through the medieval periods, the renaissance, the baroque era, and so on through impressionism and into modern time – ever increasing bird artworks.

Today, our wonderful artists and photographers create a glorious kaleidoscope of colour and joy. A brief review thus simply confirms – we (mankind) need birds for our own self-fulfilment. It is doubtful though that birds ever needed man – until now. Far too many species are threatened because of human numbers and lifestyles. We should be aware, and act appropriately. [george@naturesheart.co.za](mailto:george@naturesheart.co.za).

## **Birding Plant of the Month**

**Carrot Tree (Steganotaenia araliacea)**  
Do you really want to frighten your pre-adolescent children/grandchildren? Let them understand that you are planting carrot trees in your garden! The name is derived from a scent originating in the leaves, but they need not be informed of that. The fact is that the tree is tough and drought resistant, and being quite small (typical shrub size), will suit a smaller garden – potentially even a town house. It bears flowers in spring that will attract insects and the birds that follow them. There are also many claims of medicinal use by traditional healers (including for the treatment of HIV, and even for snake bite). It should be of interest to you if you live in a dryish and high altitude area.



**Carrot Tree**

## **Nature's Heart**

### **Specials of the Month**

**Check out our super specials!**

**Available until 31st May or while stocks last.**

- 1): Terracotta Seed Bell Holder (incl. Bell) R115,00**
- 2): Large Seed Bell R50,00**
- 3): Small Seed Bell R30,00**
- 4): Large Sunflower Bell R55**

### **Bon Mots**

*"Ignorance might be bliss. But self-forgetfulness is pure ecstasy."*  
(Kamand Kojouri)

### **Environmental Chirps**

The human body is a truly wonderful and amazingly complex entity, with interactive (and transactional) complexities that remain mysterious, and probably largely undiscovered. The recent Covid-19 pandemic demonstrated just how little the "experts" knew about the human body and the natural actions/reactions upon which it is predicated. 18 months into the pandemic, we still do not have a properly qualified. In fact, hindsight has shown that dependence upon medication such as remdesivir, and apparatus such as respirators, has been simultaneously both tragic and laughable.

If we know so little of the physiological mechanisms of the body, we certainly know far less about the psychological phenomena that characterise us as "human". Fortunately, research into opiates led to the discovery that the human body is able to replicate the pain-relieving aspects of analgesics through the natural release of endorphins from the pituitary gland. Although pain relief is probably the primary purpose of endorphin release, it was soon discovered that the effect included the production of dopamine. Dopamine is synonymous with the human experience of pleasure and euphoria. All of this was discovered in our own lifetimes, and was actually not known at the time that I struggled through biology in Matric! And this convoluted introduction serves to present a superb means of alternative dopamine creation – birding! Firstly, one should note that low

endorphin level can be associated with depression. Secondly, it is very likely that many physical health issues are related to low endorphin levels. What we do know is that endorphin levels can be boosted naturally, and have a very high correlation with activities that are known to be positive. These include regular exercise, relaxation (and good sleep), chocolates and other specific food and drinks (not surprisingly), and then a positive disposition (including acts such as laughter and charitable actions). As may be expected, the actions associated with hobbies are extremely good for dopamine production. Not least of these is birding, that simultaneously stimulates brain activity and enhances relaxation. Add to that a good camera, and you really do feel euphoric! So birding is great for your health! Yet this birding piece would not be complete without a special word... birds are "rewarded" with dopamine for producing "correct" chirping, or "punished" by reduced dopamine if they get it wrong! It is believed that this may be what teaches them to produce calls "correctly" as adults!

### **Bird of the Month**

**Greater double collared sunbird (Cinnyris afer)**  
Is this the most beautiful of all the sunbirds? Many would concur, although this writer actually finds them all equally beautiful!  
Apart from the colours and superb profile and posture, this bird should be loved by all South African birders. It is found throughout the wetter southern and eastern areas of South Africa (rather than Southern Africa). The diet is pretty standard for sunbirds, being insects (and spiders), and nectar. This fellow (from Mpumalanga), alternated between searching insects in a bush with no flowers, and nectar feeding as below in roughly 3-minute segments.  
The good news is that you too could attract one to your garden by using one of Elaine's superb nectar feeders...

