

View from the Top

Warfare is topical this month with many commemorations, and the last surviving soldiers from WW2 being recognised. This is laudable considering the momentous decisions, and the great acts of individual bravery from normal people. One group that will not feature are the avian heroes! The homing pigeon (though to have no further military role after WW1, was critical in WW2 providing covert messages from behind enemy lines, and even in tactical operations when silence was needed. In the end 38 pigeons were awarded the Dicken Medal (the highest animal medal for bravery). The only other animal recipients are dogs, cats and horses. Some of the stories are available as citations for these awards, and they are truly amazing. The award reads "we also serve". At Nature's Heart, "we also recognise".

Nevertheless, we also oppose the future use of animals in human warfare. Most of all we oppose the use of dolphins for the defence of friendly shipping.

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Birding Plant of the Month

Wild Pear (*Dombeya rotundifolia*)

This plant is not a true pear, but has pear-like flowers with a good volume of nectar.

The tree will do well in medium-sized gardens throughout South Africa, and may grow to 8m in height. It will withstand some frost, and is quite drought resistant.

The bonus for birders is that apart from being a very attractive tree, (and having a lovely scent), this specimen attracts insects of every description, and will find favour with the insect eaters. In particular the tree attracts bees.

Thus, a good choice on various grounds – in addition a tree that grows fast and will mature in your garden within 5 years!



Wild Pear

Nature's Heart

Specials of the Month

We hold the specials of May into June due to popular demand! Available until 25th June 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

"This above all: to thine own self be true And it must follow, as the night the day Thou canst not then be false to any man" (William Shakespeare)

Environmental Chirps

As a 9-year-old, my school "nature studies" project was the tuatara (an antipodean lizard). The process of gathering information was probably quite typical for the era – commencing with the Encyclopaedia Britannica, followed by a careful search in the school "library" (not that much there as I remember), then the local public library, and finally finding a small magazine article that even permitted cutting out a photograph.

Today one starts with google, and then... well one probably ends with google. The volume of information available truly boggles the mind, and exceeds that available just a short while ago by literally orders of magnitude. If one can motivate today's 9-year-olds, there is virtually nothing that would seem to limit them.

Yet no sooner has the volume of available information exploded, and the growing threat is realised – "disinformation". Hidden within those reams of digital knowledge sources, a deliberate yet subtle set of lies erodes the enhancements of knowledge. This was always to be expected from politicians and other charlatans, that have over many years perfected the art of terminological inexactitude. More recently, it has entered the public domain through the platforms offered by social media. Even more disturbing is that (so called) scientists have jumped onto the bandwagon, and have been deliberately undermining not only

knowledge, but more fundamentally they are undermining the truth in the name of science! Nowhere is this more true than in the current Covid crisis.

The reasons will almost always be nefarious, but are actually irrelevant. It is never acceptable to propagate untruths, and even rarely will credible reasons be found for withholding the truth. It has now become incumbent upon the normal information consumer to protect the integrity of the information and information sources, and be careful to ensure the voracity of literally anything being reported. I am sad to report that this is necessary even for matters of an environmental nature where disinformation is propagated for special interests.

Firstly, the original sources need to be qualified. Secondly, the information has to be cross-validated against "accepted" wisdom, and even own intuition. Thirdly, when statistics are being quoted, one needs to understand the statistical data, the assumptions, the analytical methods, and the derivations and conclusions. Above all, "follow the money" (understand who benefits from the presented data). Most media sources are irrecoverably biased; be especially careful to evaluate media reports. And finally (a personal peeve), do not yourself be guilty of propagating rubbish (so easily done on social media).

Bird of the Month

Ant-eating Chat (*Myrmecocichla formicivora*)

A bird that prefers open savanna.

Indeed, the bird is found only in Southern Africa, and will be on every foreign birding visitor's "lifer" list.

As the name suggests, this bird feeds on ants, but actually eats insects more generally. They are easily distinguished by their hunting habits and call. The sexes differ slightly in colour, but are of identical size – a bit bigger than a sparrow.

