

## View from the Top

Nature's Heart recently received a query relating to a group of birds that a customer observed that presented with defects in her garden feeding area. It turned out that it was common, and that the causes were scientifically understood. But for many who feed birds, the nagging question remains: "did I do something to hurt my wild birds?" In truth, unless the birds are afflicted by some form of contagious disease, the garden birder may be pretty certain that the problems are not related to their making. When contagious diseases are prevalent, it would be advisable to stop feeding, and even drain the bird baths in order to stop congregation of birds, based on a theory that this would separate the birds when rather searching for natural food. The normal obvious practises that always apply should be the minimum reaction, and that primary requirement is for cleaning of baths, feeders and ensuring fresh food (including nectar) to prevent fungal or bacterial contamination. It should touch a nerve to realise that for contagious diseases, the best you could do would be a form of social distancing for birds! Much like our birds, the intelligent human should choose to socially distance in a wilderness area. [george@naturesheart.co.za](mailto:george@naturesheart.co.za).

## Birding Plant of the Month

Kei Apple (*Dovyalis caffra*)

Three warnings on this tree – you really should plant a pair (male and female) to experience the fruit, secondly, beware of monkeys, and thirdly, the tree does have thorns. These aside, the fruit is known for attracting wild birds and animals, and for the industrious will provide a decent breakfast jelly. The tree is also highly attractive to bees and other insects. It will grow throughout the eastern reaches of the country and reaches about 6m (in ten years). Thus the tree is very well suited to smaller gardens. Your bulbuls and go-away birds will thank you.



Kei Apple

## Nature's Heart

### Specials of the Month

#### WE INTRODUCE 2 NEW PRODUCTS!

Introductory offer available until 30<sup>th</sup> July or while stocks last.

1): Terracotta Seed Bunny (incl. small seed pack) R100,00

2): Sparrow Nest and Rest House R300,00

### Bon Mots

"If it doesn't open, it's probably not your door" (Gabriel Schirm)

### Environmental Chirps

In South Africa the Government publishes (or is intended to publish) lists of animals that are either critically endangered species, or endangered species, or vulnerable species, or protected species. As far as birds go, there is also special protection for 18 families of sea or waterbirds. Apart from this latter group that are specifically mentioned in act 46 of 1973, it just seems that simple access to the lists is not something freely available. Having struggled to locate anything, I am presently assuming that no such list actually exists from Government. (Amazingly, a tree list does exist having been published as Government Notice 34595 of 2011). Perhaps bird lists exist too, and are unfathomably difficult to access. There appears to be reference to the IUCN Red List, (in own right a very unfriendly website where only overview data is readily presented). However, the potential for listing "Protected" status is obviously beyond the ambit of the Red List. (Here one should add that the Birdlife SA website does give a very good spreadsheet summary of threatened status of South African birds). In the absence of a clear and logical RSA Government regulatory list, one may assume that the Birdlife list is at least a thorough reflection of the birds that require special protection in South Africa. Looking at that list, one is immediately struck by the plight of our vultures. There are also many other examples, and the list is truly compulsory reading if you are

interested in the conservation of wild birds.

Yet is it that important? Upon reflection, it struck me that very few people would want to harm wild birds, whether endangered or not. Apart from the indigent, who may need these creatures for food, virtually no-one (except possibly a few malfeasants) would intentionally abuse them. A far likelier case is that we cause damage by actions and omissions that were unintended.

We should be careful to:

- Reduce injudicious use of poisons and baits
- Avoid improper use of pesticides
- Limit plastic waste
- Manage our pet cats properly
- Preserve our wilderness areas
- Provide better agriculture and habitat management
- Reduce wild fires
- Improve water management and reduce pollution

It is true that these actions are not always simple. Also, most of the positive effect would be felt by unthreatened bird species. Yet if we do not properly care even for our common garden species, we will surely write off our great raptors and other threatened birds.

## Bird of the Month

African Red-eyed Bulbul (*Pycnonotus nigricans*)

Sadly, this bird is generally found more towards our western parts and southern interior, and indeed this pair was photographed in a friends garden a mere 800km from Gauteng! Yet they are found in many South African gardens, and they do love Elaine's BirdGrub, and they are joyful and gregarious and beautiful. Perhaps a little larger than the well-known dark capped bulbul, they are otherwise very similar in character. This is a bird that projects happiness.

