

## View from the Top

For the second consecutive year “normal” people have experienced limitations in our vacation plans, and in our thoughts towards the new year. As a rule, we have faced these issues with some fortitude. Our greatest sympathy goes towards the aged who are very often tied in gilded cages. Yet we are also very conscious of the effect on our younger society members. As an example, student life has been severely curtailed, and is in some cases non-existent. This is not normal, and neither can we allow it to become normal.

More recently, we have seen debate centring on vaccine mandates, and restrictions to the rights of the unvaccinated. As much as the advent of the covid-19 pandemic has threatened our desire for safety and good long lives, the messages being sent relating to restrictions of our fellow citizens individual right to free choice is disturbing. It is “not normal” behaviour and needs to end.

That having been said, Nature's Heart recommends vaccination as an interim mechanism to prolong life until a suitable long-term solution becomes apparent, and we record that we are all fully vaccinated. This year we have two Christmas wishes – A joyous Christmas firstly, and a new year wish to free us from the bind of this disastrous disease.

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## Birding Plant of the Month

Pepper Bark Tree (*Warburgia salutaris*)

The pepper bark gets a turn as tree of the month because it is one of the RSA “Trees of the Year” for 2021, and since 2021 is ending it was appropriate. Yet it is also an important plant to grow in your garden, because it has medicinal properties, and is therefore being destroyed in the wild. Fortunately, the tree grows very easily, and is well suited to frost free gardens, including medium and even smaller areas. An option is to use a large pot that will restrict tree size. The reasonably thick foliage will enhance the garden, and provide protection for birds.



**Pepper Bark Tree**

## Nature's Heart

### Announcement:

**Nature's Heart closes on the 18<sup>th</sup> December 2021 and reopens on 8th January 2022. However, even then we will still be operating in an environment of constrained supply, particularly for terracotta products, and our previous announcement of shipping delays of up to a week remain in operation. Please be patient.**

### Bon Mots

“The smallest minority on earth is the individual. Those who deny individual rights cannot claim to be defenders of minorities.” (Ann Rand)

### Environmental Chirps

Is the search for oil/gas legitimate when balancing the need for RSA economic development against any potential harm that may be caused to the marine environment? This question is now topical, considering the plans for Royal Dutch Shell to perform seismic shock exploration across the east coast of South Africa. It also needs to be considered in the light of increasing opposition from environmental and other groupings to these proposals.

It is wrong to maintain an aloof disinterest in this process, but one needs to be completely objective in providing an evaluation. The shocks are caused by an air cannon that intends to induce sufficient pressure as to penetrate deep into the earth; by measuring reflected energy, engineers are able to assess potential sites for fossil fuel deposits. The potential harm is caused by secondary effects on marine wildlife (fish, mammals and crustaceans) of these shocks, but with energy dissipation as a square or cubed law (essentially something in between) depending on test geometry. What one has to note, is that these tests are a potential precursor to, and substantially less risky than the actual oil/gas exploitation and drilling activities. The damage caused by an oil disaster is potentially orders of magnitude greater, and should be subject to separate evaluation.

Fortunately, applicable studies on seismic survey have been published, and we are able to have a reasonable estimate of potential damage. The greatest effect is on mammals that require sound for communication, and in particular on

whales. These animals have communication curtailed for distances of around 30km, and lesser interference may be even further than that. It will have an impact on all activities, including breeding. Typically, marine mammals leave the area and avoid the shocks. Despite some claims and sensationalistic reporting there is little current evidence of long-term trauma or death to these animals, and they should return quickly to previously surveyed areas. An under-evaluated area is the potential for hearing loss, but presently, the risks are postulated but not properly confirmed.

Fish are less able to avoid the area of a survey. There is evidence of impact on fish and in particular fish larvae. The impact appears localised and less important that the effect on the mammals.

There is also clear evidence of stress affecting other animals subjected to the seismic shocks – crabs, squid and many other. Again, many of these animals are unable to avoid the sonic blasts, and those in the close vicinity may even suffer permanent damage of one form or another.

The challenge is therefore to balance the risks against the possible developmental advantages. Our view is that the area is still too unknown, and that testing should be stopped until we are able to properly quantify the effects.

## Bird of the Month

Coqui Francolin (*Campocolinus coqui*)  
Being the appropriate season, we decided to regale you with the exploits of a “Christmas bird” for our bird of the month. Despite the exotic looks, this is a very common francolin. Many will be surprised at just how close they approach to our suburban garden areas. Those who are able to find them locally will know that they have a beautiful call. The bird is far smaller than one realises from typical images, and is about dove size.

The lasting impression is created by the striking colours, and the variation between the head and then feathers from the neck down. A very special (if common) bird.

