

Wildlife Circular 17 - July / August 2021

In the past few months I have read a couple of articles on the ever increasing threats to wildlife and our environment. Firstly the September 2020 edition of Veld and Flora featured a report on the devastation being wreaked by plant poachers in Namaqualand where rare succulents are targeted. The article spoke of 15000 Cone (*Conophytum*) plants being stripped from a single hillside in the Rigtersveld. These are highly prized in the international horticultural trade. Two Koreans were caught with 60 000 individual illegally harvested *Conophytum* specimens. Another recent article in a weekend newspaper spoke about the frightening demise of insect species especially in the developed world. This has a knock-on effect on many other species. For instance, the numbers of swallows, which are dependent on insects for food, has fallen dramatically. Believe it or not human populations are dependent on healthy insect populations too. In this context think of bees. Without them many of our crops would not be pollinated.



Images of *Conophytum calculus* taken from Google

This has got me thinking along the lines that we need to do more to protect our environment from undesirable developments and the rampant spread of alien invasive species. We are privileged to live in an incredibly beautiful but also fragile part of South Africa. We recently contacted the Municipality about a building site in Constantia Kloof where large quantities of sand / cement / building litter were washing down the gutters into the stream a few hundred metres below the site. This despite OSCAE permit conditions expressly prohibiting this sort of wanton pollution of our environment. The stream flows into the Touw River Lagoon, an important nursery for young fish and a popular recreational area. Think of the damage being done not only to the stream but to the entire ecosystem. We received a very positive response from the Municipality Building Control Section with a building inspector calling on us within a day. We visited the site together and the problem was speedily resolved.

Last week we drove out to Oudtshoorn to view the snow on the Swartberg Range. I have therefore decided to deviate somewhat from the normal parade of birds / beasts / goggas and include some pictures that I took of the magnificent scenery in the hope that this will inspire the readers to become proactive about preserving our truly wonderful surrounds.



The above 2 pictures taken about 10 to 15 kilometers short of Oudtshoorn showcase the magnificent spectacle of the snow-covered Swartberg stretching across the horizon. The snow tipped peaks almost appear to be floating in air.



Above picture: Towards the upper end of Schoemanspoort there are a few picturesque farms that provide an attractive foreground for the snow covered mountains in the distance.

After turning off onto the Swartberg Pass Road just before reaching the Congo Caves every turn on the road presented yet another breath-taking view of the mountains. One of the pleasures of being retired is that one doesn't have to rush, so many stops were made to take photos.



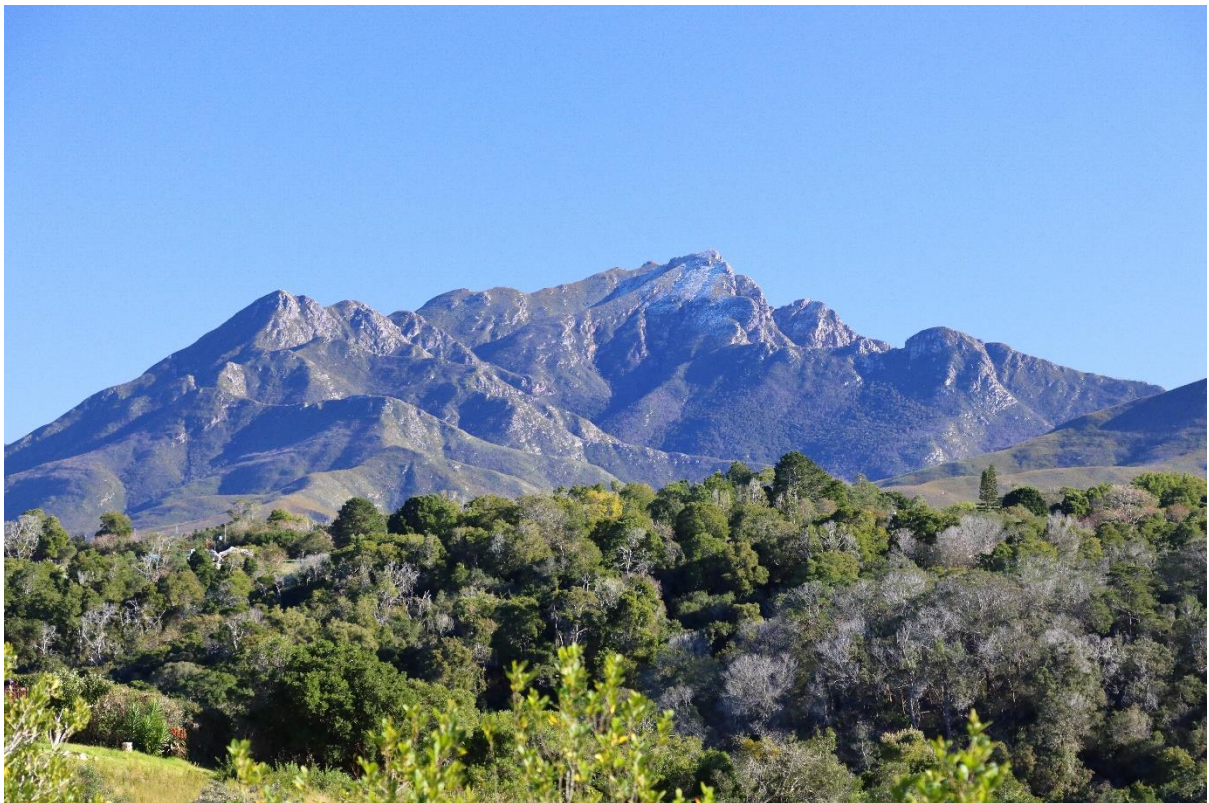


The pass was unfortunately closed as conditions were too dangerous even for 4 x 4 vehicles. Needless to say the drivers of no less than 8 vehicles ignored the closed signs and ended up getting stuck on the pass. The foot of the pass looked like rush hour at school closing time. We paid a visit to Kobus se Gat Veld Kombuis for lunch before heading home. We really do have some interesting place names in South Africa



We have been fortunate enough to have travelled widely and over the years have visited many different countries. South Africa definitely compares well with much of the beautiful

scenery to be seen elsewhere. This should hopefully inspire us to become more proactive in helping to preserve our precious environment.



By comparison Cradock Peak in the photo above had only a light sprinkling of snow.

Flower of the Month

The photo below of a King Protea (*Protea Cynaroides*), our national flower, was taken in Jan Heyneke's garden. This is in some ways the ideal Protea to grow in your garden, as it is relatively small usually reaching a height of about 1m and does not become a large untidy sprawling bush like many other Proteas.



The plant is a woody shrub with thick stems and large dark green leaves. The number of flowers produced varies considerably as does the range of colours. This is a very widespread Protea and is found from the Cedarberg in the west to Grahamstown in the east and from the coast to mountain heights.

The amazing variety in plant size, habit and flower colour / size is the reason why this genus was named after the Greek god Proteus who could change his shape at will. The flower of the King Protea resembles the Globe Artichoke vegetable which is called *Cynara scolymus* hence *cynaroides*.

Another very good reason for having these plants in your garden is that the flowers are pollinated by birds and they are loved by Sugarbirds and Sunbirds who are frequent visitors. The flowers are long lasting but generally produce relatively few seeds. The seeds can be sown into light well drained sandy soil in autumn and then covered by a thin layer of soil (about 1cm). Seeds sprout after 3 - 4 weeks. The plants can also be propagated from cuttings. Take a 6-10cm long cutting from current season growth, dip briefly in rooting hormone and grow in a mixture of coarse sand (75%) and peat moss (25%) inside at a moderate temperature, misting the plants intermittently. Once rooted they can be potted and then planted out in autumn. New growth can be encouraged by pruning back old woody growth to ground level. The plants re-sprout from the underground rootstock.

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