



Monthly Newsletter

11/23

CONTACT: Main Office - 033 330 3036.

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Editorial

Attracting wildlife into your garden – by Sandra Naidoo

One of the many joys of your the garden is to see different birds, butterflies, bees, and other amazing creatures visiting; and if conditions are good, making their home in your garden.

In almost all cases they are attracted to a water, food, or a nesting source, therefore, if you are interested in having a wildlife natural habitat to in your garden, it is important, if possible, to plan the setting of your shrubs, trees, and flower beds.

If your garden has a vast expanse of lawn, the diversity of wildlife will be far less; birds require trees to use as look-out points and shrubs to forage for insects, lizards and insects need rocks and logs to use as hiding and nesting sites. Having a water source and indigenous trees and shrubs, with lots of interesting rock and log features will provide an ideal natural environment to encourage a multitude of wild species.



In the average garden, a successful method to attract wildlife is to plant a green corridor of indigenous shrubs and trees. In the outer areas of the garden, which are less frequented, logs and rocks can be included under shrubs and trees which can serve as an area for ground nesting birds. By including a small wetland area by building a natural pond surrounded by reeds and grass would be the final step to transform your garden into a sanctuary for small animal life.

Fruit bearing trees and nectar rich flowers will attract fruit and nectar eating birds, the nectar rich flowers attract insects as well which will in turn attract insect eating birds. Including indigenous plants like Aloes, Bottlebrush, Saliva, and Freylinia will attract the smaller, colourful Sunbirds and Cape White Eye.

Should you not be able to provide such a natural setting, or if your garden is small, birds can still be attracted to the garden by providing seeds, worms, and fruit. Most birds are opportunistic and would not miss a chance at an easy meal although bird experts would advise not to make birds dependent on you for food and provide a limited amount.

Composting your vegetable waste in your garden will not only enrich your soil by attracting earthworms, but these earthworms in turn will also attract birdlife.





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Installing a bird bath or two, nesting for solitary bees are some animal activity in your garden.

Gardening for wildlife is not entirely especially in the beginning when first garden. However, most people find in the soil, and getting close to nature, at the end of a long day, to sit and home is not only an enjoyable to relieve stress and the



logs and owl boxes or bee hotels additional ways of introducing

easy, and can be quite hard work, establishing a wildlife-friendly spending time in their garden, digging wonderfully therapeutic, and being able, watch the wildlife that call your garden past-time but also a great way pressures of modern life.

Statistics for October:

ADMISSIONS

BIRDS	MAMMALS	RAPTORS	REPTILES
46	9	5	2

RELEASES

BIRDS	MAMMALS	RAPTORS	REPTILES
13	2	4	1

New Admissions

Each year we try to educate people on not bringing fledgling birds in. While we understand that there are often concerns over dogs and cats catching these temporarily land bound little nest leavers, removing them from under parental care is possibly one of the worst things a person can do. Fledgling birds are fully imprinted on their parents, their natal area, and on the natural foods their parents have been feeding them. When removed from this familiar environment, these young birds experience such high levels of stress that they often die. It is incredibly challenging to try and get them to adjust to a rehabilitation setting where everything is so unfamiliar and frightening for them. Nestlings are easier to raise as they are far more accepting of changes to their environments and feeding patterns, and adult birds, although stressed, are already self-sufficient, and left in peace with food and water, are often able to heal quickly on their own. So, our take home message, is **PLEASE don't pick up a grounded fledgling unless it is already injured**, and PLEASE keep your cats and dogs





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away for a few hours until the little bird has figured out how to get off the ground and up into cover.

And on that note, we had quite a variety of bird species come into care during October, including some very unusual admissions such as a Cardinal Woodpecker (1), Giant Kingfisher (2), and Narina Trogon (3). The woodpecker, still just a nestling, was rescued when the branch its nest was in came crashing to the ground in a storm. Its sibling did not survive the fall, but it was lucky enough to be rescued and did amazingly well in care, and we were able to release it at the end of October as a fully independent young adult. The Narina Trogon, a beautiful adult male, made the unfortunate mistake of colliding with a patio window, but thankfully only suffered a minor concussion, and was released again as soon as it had recovered. The Giant Kingfisher, an adult female, sustained an odd injury to the wing after being struck by a vehicle. While the bird did not sustain any breaks, she is nevertheless not able to fly, and we suspect tendon or nerve damage. For now, she is still in care, and we will only be able to tell with time if she is going to recover her ability to fly.

The other birds admitted included the more common species such as shrikes and boubous, chats and robins, weavers, sparrows, and seedeaters, starlings, thrushes and bulbuls, egrets, herons, and geese, and the obligatory pigeons, doves, and hadadas.

In the raptors department, we really thought that we would be slowing down with owl admissions by now, but owls again dominated the admissions, with 3 Spotted Eagle Owls and 1 Barn Owl being admitted. The only non-owl admission was a juvenile Lanner Falcon (4). What was very, very sad for our team is that not one of these birds of prey survived. The Barn Owl died from the blood loss and trauma associated with being stuck on a barbed wire fence (for who knows how long) the adult Spotted Eagle Owl had a fractured spine with no chance of recovery, one Spotted Eagle Owl chick had sustained such a severe fracture on its leg after falling from the nest, that all attempts to splint and strap the leg still not result in healing, and the final chick suffered from an extremely debilitating case of Metabolic Bone Disorder



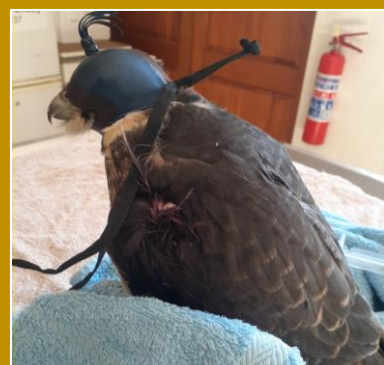
1



2



3



4



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from being incorrectly hand raised on a completely deficient diet. The young Lanner Falcon was no luckier than the others as a fall from its nest on top of a silo had resulted in a large section of the wing being irreparably torn off. We had to console ourselves with those raptors that could at least be released in October.

The mammal's department fared quite a lot better in October with the admission of, among other things, two suspected African Wildcats (5). We say suspected as genetic tests will need to be done to establish the purity of their DNA first due to the high incidence of hybridization with feral cats in some areas. One of these cats is still just a kitten, picked up on a farm, and it will be some time before it is old enough for release. The other is an adult male which was trapped as a poultry 'thief' and will need to be relocated to a safer habitat where domestic chickens will not prove to be such a temptation. Another young antelope joined our growing 'herd' during October. The Nyala lamb (6) was found wandering in the roads at a busy intersection on the outside of a reserve after poachers had cut a hole in the fence. She had obviously become separated from her mother, who was sadly nowhere in sight on the other side of the fence. We also saw a third Common Reedbuck lamb admitted, but this youngster died from a severe infection caused by dog bites, despite having daily veterinary care to treat the wounds, and being on a course of antibiotics. Another unfortunate loss was that of an Oribi (7) which had been hit by a vehicle. These antelope fall under the Threatened or Protected Species (ToPS) list, so it was a blow for species conservation when this young, otherwise healthy adult died from the injuries it sustained.

Testudines (the correct term for tortoises and terrapins) were part of the reptile admissions for October. A Leopard Tortoise (8) which had been caught in a fire is still in care for some severe burn injuries, and the prognosis is guarded for its outcome. The tortoise is being treated daily, with twice daily dressing changes to encourage healing



5



6



7



8

to take place in the burnt areas of its body and shell. It will be a long road to recovery. A little Marsh Terrapin was much luckier, and by some happy chance survived being mauled by a domestic cat and is now living a very happy life in one of the many natural ponds at FreeMe Wildlife. A young Nile Crocodile (9) is also presently in care after it was picked up in a river on a farm in the Wartburg area. It is suspected to be an escapee from a nearby crocodile farm, and we are going to do our best to ensure it is returned to suitable habitat in the wild.

Releases - *the best part!*

Apart from the Narina Trogon, which was released after recovering from a concussion, a Red-winged Starling concussed by hail was also released, as were some sparrows, the Cardinal Woodpecker, a Red-eyed Dove, Speckled Mousebird, Laughing Dove, Speckled Pigeons, a Cattle Egret, Familiar Chat, and an Amethyst Sunbird.

The Crowned Eagle (10) admitted from Eshowe at the beginning of the year with a stick through her wing, had a long, slow road to recovery, eventually obtaining strong, steady, powered flight in the 20m flight tunnel 6 months after admission, and was finally released back in her home territory in October. A Long-crested Eagle (11) with a broken wing was also returned home to its territory after fully recovering from the break and passing its flight tests in the 20m flight tunnel. The Spotted Eagle Owl which affectionately became known as 'Highway Owl' after a dramatic rescue saw it saved from where it was stranded against the middle barrier of the busy freeway, made a steady recovery in care, and was also able to be sent back home in October. Adding to these releases, the adult Yellow-billed Kite (a summer migrant) that came in from the Karkloof area with both wings fractured, also made a full recovery and was able to be released to return to the Karkloof for the summer season. She will have lost the opportunity to breed this year, but at least she is alive to return and breed next season.



9



10



11



12



13



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Another Scrub Hare (12) was released at Simbithi Eco Estate in October as part of the Scrub Hare reintroduction program FreeMe Wildlife is undertaking at Simbithi. Little 'Elsa' a Grey Duiker lamb (13) hand-raised at FreeMe Wildlife was also sent for release on a farm in the Karkloof area now that she is fully grown and independent.

Apart from the tiny terrapin that escaped a cat attack, no other reptile releases took place in October.

Outreach and Engagement



The Siyabonga Helping Hands for Africa Eco-Club Kids learnt about the precious natural resource of water as part of their October studies. Added to that was a look at the importance of Wetlands, followed with a clean-up day of the local small wetland near one of the care centres.



The Kid's Bush Camp held at Fountainhill Estate in October was one of the best camps held yet, with a trip down to the picnic site along the Umgeni River. The kids got to enjoy some time in the river as well as finding interesting things out on the night walk and picking up an intact python skeleton on the biodiversity treasure hunt.



The Fountainhill Estate was not just the location for the Bush Camp in October, but also hosted its 7th annual research symposium, combining research done in the natural resources, agricultural and biological sectors of the estate. FreeMe Wildlife presented on the bat species on the estate and their link to controlling agricultural pests.

Bookings for the 1 month and 3-month wildlife rehabilitation courses are open for next year, and spots are filling up quickly. More information can be found on our website:

<https://freemewildlife.org/courses/>

Projects and Research

October saw both the Spotted Eagle Owl chicks at St Michael's Complex being fitted with ID rings as well as the Spotted Eagle Owl chicks at Hilton College. Added to this, a newly





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occupied owl box belonging to the Jakobi family was added to the Owl Box Project database and we look forward to the occupancy data from this box over the next few years.

A re-sighting of one of the colour-ringed birds came in during October. We were pleased to see that a rehabilitated Long-crested Eagle that was released in December 2022 in the Underberg area is still alive and doing well.



October also saw two new projects being added to FreeMe Wildlife's profile. The Wildlife Crimes Project focusses on providing evidence to support wildlife poaching incidents through necropsies and sample collecting at FreeMe Wildlife. The work we have done thus far in collaboration with our wildlife authority, Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, and the SAPS Stock Theft Unit has seen a couple of successful convictions of poachers. To find out more about the project, and how you can support the costs of the work, please visit our website:

<https://freemewildlife.org/the-wildlife-crimes-project/>



A far more ambitious project is the Elephant Project, which has essentially been set up to ensure the survival of the elephants in the Pongola area of KZN through the establishment of a trans-frontier park across the border of KZN between Pongola and eSwatini, which will allow the elephants to move freely across this area. The project has already seen a count being done of the elephants in the area, and an agreement being reached whereby the elephants will not be culled. This monumental project is being facilitated by FreeMe Wildlife, but involves the collaboration of key players, including national government, provincial wildlife authorities, and landowners. Animal Survival International has so far helped with providing the funds for emergency operations to ensure the elephants are safe from further persecution, but we are looking for more stakeholders to get involved in a project of this size. More details are on our website: <https://freemewildlife.org/the-elephant-project/>





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Support:

We would like to say thank you to the **LIONS OF HOWICK** for raising funds for FreeMe Wildlife in October.

Another thank you goes out to **PETER'S GATE HERBAL CENTRE** for using the Open Gardens day to raise funds for FreeMe Wildlife.

And last, but not least, we thank the **BRIGITTE BARDOT FOUNDATION** for supporting us with animal care costs.

Remember, without your support, there will not be a FreeMe Wildlife centre. Every little bit helps to keep us going, so please set up a debit order, join our Custodianship Program, or encourage family and friends to donate to our cause:

<https://freemewildlife.org/support-us/>



We have a new social media page dedicated solely to thanking our patrons, sponsors, and Custodians for their support.

FreeMe Wildlife is an organization built and supported by people who love wildlife and the natural world.

Go and have a look, like, and follow the page:

[FreeMe Wildlife Champions](#)