

In your garden

Issue 7 - 19 August 2021



Golden Moles are friends not foes

I know that many gardeners despise moles for the damage they can do to lawns and gardens. But here is a surprise for you. Golden Moles are not the culprits. Yes, they do push up small mounds from their burrows, but the real problem animals are Molerats.

Besides both burrowing tunnels there are many differences between the Golden Moles and Molerats. Golden Moles eat insects and small reptiles which is good news for gardeners. Molerats, however, are vegetarian and feed off plant matter such as tubers, roots and bulbs. They are a pest to gardeners and farmers. Unfortunately, Golden Moles are more or less innocent victims when a gardener decides to try ridding his garden of "moles."

Golden Moles are nocturnal and do spend time on the surface looking for food. When they are exposed like this, they are vulnerable to owls and other predators. The Golden Mole in the picture was caught by one of my dogs and deposited in the driveway. Fortunately, it was not injured. I took it back to the lawn and watched as it disappeared under ground.

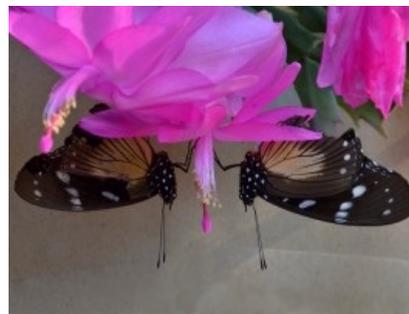
There are around 15 species of Golden Mole found in South Africa. Each area has its own mix of a few species that are separated from other species. They mainly occur in the coastal regions although some species are found inland.



Pig's Ears

Firstly, I would like to mention that, in my opinion, the leaves of this succulent do not actually resemble the ears of a pig. Nevertheless, the common name for *Cotyledon orbiculata* is Pig's Ears. The Afrikaans name is Plakkie.

This winter flowering succulent is one of my favourites, although I must admit that I have a particular interest in succulents. The leaves are thick and



Meet the Layman butterfly

I don't know how the Layman butterfly got its common name but there must be a story there somewhere. This butterfly is quite common along the eastern region of South Africa. It occurs from around East London through to Limpopo. Beyond our borders it can be found as far north as Ethiopia.

fairly round and most often are edged in red. Some plants have grey foliage while others are green. The orange-red flowers are borne on a sturdy, long stalk and hang down from the top.

Pig's Ears can be found growing, in suitable conditions, virtually anywhere in South Africa. In its natural environment it is normally found on rocky outcrops in a variety of habitats. This makes it an ideal plant for a rockery. They are hardy plants that don't need a lot of water, but they do require the garden, or container, to have good drainage. They prefer to be planted in a sunny position but can also be grown in a spot with semi-shade. Pig's Ears can tolerate some frost.

Traditionally the leaves are used to cure corns and warts. The leaves are applied as a dressing, and it is said to be an effective treatment for these ailments. Take note that the Pig's Ears plant are toxic to livestock.

They are found in a variety of habitats including gardens and parks. The pair shown above rested on my Christmas Cactus for a couple of days and were normally facing each other as shown in the photo. They are on the wing all year round although they are most abundant in summer. The Layman likes to feed on alkaloid sap that seeps out of damaged plants.

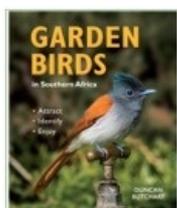
The Layman is fairly large with females having a wingspan of around 65 mm. The male is smaller having a wingspan of around 55 mm. The male and female has fairly similar colouration. They are very similar to the butterfly known as the Chief. The Layman is unpalatable to most predators which allows it to get away with a slow, almost lazy, way of flying.

The Layman is attracted to gardens that have its main host plants which are Monkey Rope (*Cynanchum ellipticum*) and the Natal Dog-wort (*Cynanchum natalitium*). The female lays up to 40 eggs on the underside of the leaves.

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"In your garden" is looking for advertisers. This newsletter is aimed at South African gardeners, particularly those that are interested in indigenous plants as well as the birds, butterflies and more that their gardens attract. If you are interested, then please contact us at: steven@natureinyourgarden.co.za.

I look forward to hearing from you.



Subscriber Competition

As a subscriber to this newsletter, you are in line to win a copy of "Garden Birds in South Africa" by Duncan Butchart.

This excellent book describes around 100 birds that are likely to appear in gardens in South Africa. The book describes how you can set up a bird friendly garden to attract different species. 50 species of plants are described including trees, aloes, proteas and much more. The main part of the book covers 101 species of birds. This section not only helps to identify them but also how to attract them. Other chapters detail subjects such as feeding birds, providing nesting sites and migration.

This competition will close when the newsletter has 1,000 subscribers so why not encourage your friends and family to subscribe! Unfortunately, this competition is only available to subscribers in South Africa. Delivery will be done to the winner's nearest branch of Postnet.

Send me your garden bird list

Do you keep a garden bird list, and you live in a housing complex or estate? I would like to start building up a database of garden birds for as many complexes and estates as possible. As I start getting information then I will make it available to anyone who is interested. So, if you have a garden bird list then I would like to ask if you would be kind enough to send me a copy, and to send any updates as new birds are added to your list. In future issues I will be inviting readers to send in a short article about the birds in their gardens. It is your chance to brag about the birds that visit you and how you attract them.

Sevilla Estate, Monavoni
Centurion, 0157
steven@natureonyourdoorstep.co.za



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