

In your garden

Issue 10 - 9 September 2021



The hornet that isn't a hornet

This beautiful insect is known as a Pleasant Hornet, and it is actually a species of moth. The scientific name for it is *Euchromia amoena*. There is not a lot of information available despite it having a wide distribution from South Africa through to Bangladesh. In South Africa it occurs in the coastal regions of the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal.

As can be seen from the photograph they are brightly coloured. Perhaps the bold black, yellow and orangey-red led someone to think that it must be dangerous and decided it must be a hornet. Then someone else realised that it is harmless, so they added the "pleasant" in front of the "hornet." I don't know. The bright colours are probably an indication that it is poisonous or distasteful to predators.

What is known is that they are active during the day, and they have a wingspan of around 4 to 5 cm. They are attracted to flowers with a lot of pollen and are believed to favour flowers that are white in colour.

The Pleasant Hornet belongs to a group of moths known as Handmaidens. There are around 30 species of Handmaidens in South Africa and most of them have black bodies with colourful patches and bands.



Tongue-leaved Mesemb

South Africa is blessed with the number of succulents that we have. Take a trip to any decent nursery and you will find a wide variety of succulents available. Fortunately, most of these are grown from cuttings or seed which lessens the impact on the natural populations of these interesting plants. The Tongue-leaved Mesemb is still classed as a vulnerable species in its natural range. It only occurs in a limited area around Calitzdorp. The plants are eaten



Village Weaver

Gardeners in the Eastern Cape, KZN, Mpumalanga and Limpopo should be very familiar with the Village Weaver, previously known as the Spotted-backed Weaver. These birds are very common and not shy to visit feeding stations in large numbers.

There are three species of "masked" weaver in South Africa. When in breeding plumage the male Lesser Masked Weaver has black over the front of its face and a white eye. The

because the land is overgrazed or are trampled. Soil erosion in this area is also taking its toll on the population.

The Tongue-leaved Mesemb has thick leaves, such of which are tongue shaped. The flowers are bright yellow with petals that curve back slightly. The leaves have a waxy coat. They are found in rocky areas with shale-based soil, and they seem to benefit from being near or under a bush. The plants grow in clumps which eventually form mats.

The Tongue-leaved Mesemb's natural habitat receives winter rainfall with a maximum of 200 mm per year. In these conditions the plant will flower in late autumn or in winter. They can be propagated in summer rainfall areas. Just make sure that they are planted in an area, or container, with good drainage.

The scientific name for the Tongue-leaved Mesemb is *Glottiphyllum linguiforme*.

Southern Masked Weaver is black up to its forehead and it has a red eye. The Village Weaver also has a red eye but the black ends at the top of its bill.

The Village Weaver is one of the most common weavers and is widely distributed in Africa. They are most common in gardens during the breeding season. In winter they tend to disperse away from their nesting sites.

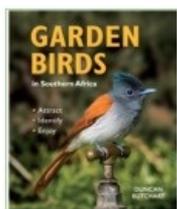
These birds are regulars at bird feeders and eat a lot of seed. Seed, however, only forms part of a more varied diet. They will eat food and other scraps that you put out, but their natural diet includes insects, nectar and bits of flowers.

Male Village Weavers tend to breed with two females at the same time. He makes a nest for each of them. After inspection the female may actually reject the nest and destroy it. He then has to have another attempt. The nest could be located in a reedbed or on the outer edges of a tree. Once a female has accepted a nest then she lines the inner chamber with soft plant material and lays her eggs. Most often 2 or 3 eggs are laid but nests with 5 eggs have been recorded. The female incubates the eggs for 12 days and then both parents feed the chicks for up to 3 weeks.

Advertise in this newsletter

"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.

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