

In your garden

Issue 9 - 2 September 2021



The fast growing, easy going Waterberg Bell-bush

The Waterberg Bell-bush (*Freylinia tropica*) is a beautiful shrub for your garden. It always seems to have some flowers on it but in spring it is absolutely covered in flowers. It is available with either mauve or white flowers, with the mauve being the most stunning in my opinion. Other names for this shrub are Honeybell Bush and Blue Freylinia.

This shrub grows to a height of around 2 metres with a spread of 1 metre or perhaps a bit more. They grow quickly and are quite hardy. The Waterberg Bell-bush can be planted in either a semi-shade or full sun position. They are quite frost resistant once established. They cannot tolerate drought so water them well in summer but cut down a bit in winter.

Some gardeners like to use this shrub as a screen as its foliage is quite dense. It can also be planted in a container. It is best propagated from cuttings.

The flowers are not only attractive to humans but also to insects. When it is in flower you will notice numerous insects visiting it. My Waterberg Bell-bushes attract a lot of Honeybees and Carpenter Bees. They are also visited by some of the sunbirds such as the Collared Sunbird.



The noisiest bird on the block

The Hadeda Ibis has become an extremely common garden bird in many areas of South Africa. Our lawns provide an ideal place for them to probe around looking crickets and other insects. I don't know, however, if they are always welcomed by homeowners!

These big birds can be quite a nuisance! Firstly, they have the most raucous call which they love to make randomly during the day or night.



Noisiest insect on the block

Cicadas are well known for the shrill, non-stop call of the males but I wonder how many people have actually seen one? Although you can easily hear them it is hard to track down the source of the noise.

Cicadas are normally green or brown in colour and around 4 cm in length. They feed off the sap from plants. They have five eyes! These consist of two large ones and three small ones

Flocks of them are particularly good at calling during the critical part of a TV program making it impossible to hear the dialogue. Next on the list of irritating things is their rather large droppings. I have found that Hadedas like spending time around swimming pools and they leave their droppings everywhere. By the way they will probably end up swimming in your pool. Your dogs might not appreciate them either as they love pinching pellets from their bowls. The Hadedas will carry the pellet to the dog's water bowl to dip it in the water. Lastly, don't be surprised if they wander into your house.

The photo is of "our" Hadedas who we named Hoppy. He had a swelling on the joint of his left leg causing him to walk with a limp. He stayed in our garden with his mate for a number of years. We then moved house and I wondered how the new tenants would get along with Hoppy. He had all the bad habits mentioned above but was very tame and would eat out of my hand. Over the years they raised a number of chicks but also lost quite a few because of disturbance from monkeys.

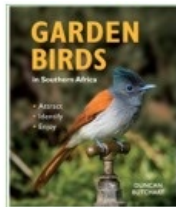
in between. Only the males make the mating call, and they do this by vibrating their tymbals which are essentially vibrating surfaces. The sound is amplified by membranes within the cicada's body. The females hear the noise through ears that are located on her abdomen. Interestingly the abdomen of the male is more or less hollow and acts as a resonating chamber.

The female Cicada lays her eggs in slits which she has cut into the bark of a tree. Once the nymphs emerge from the eggs they drop to the ground and burrow into the soil. They tunnel down 2 metres or more. While in the nymph phase of their lives the cicadas feed off sap from the roots of trees. I am not sure how long the South African cicadas stay in their nymph form but there is a well-known species in North America that spends between 13 to 17 years before they emerge. When the nymph is ready to take on its adult form it emerges from the ground and climbs up the tree trunk to a height of 30 cm or so. At this point its nymphal skin splits and allows the adult to emerge.

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.

Steven Herbert Projects
6657 Escamillo Street
Sevilla Estate, Monavoni
Centurion, 0157
steven@natureonyourdoorstep.co.za



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