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MARCH 2019
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FRONT COVER

SA's most beautiful Appaloosa, Kiowa Sahara, bred by Nightingales Appaloosa Stud.

COMMENT, by Pete Bower

What will happen...?



What will happen when, in a few years' time, the infestation of pompom weed in the Highveld's grasslands has become so severe that there is no more grazing left?

And if you doubt that this is possible, take a drive to the City of Tshwane-run Rietvlei Nature Reserve near Irene. Much of its open grassland, home to populations of zebra, wildebeest, eland, waterbuck and rhino, among other species, is now a sea of delicate pink blooms. Which, by the time you read this will have gone to seed, spreading millions upon millions of windborne seeds far and wide.

Heaven knows what the managers of Rietvlei will do when their grazing land is so severely degraded that there is insufficient fodder for their animals, but what will happen in a normal agricultural context is that farmers will be forced to plough up their pastures annually, and reseed every year with fresh fodder and grazing grasses. This will add hugely to their costs which in turn will drive up the price of beef and mutton, not to mention the cost of keeping horses.

And such ploughing and planting is not possible on a significant proportion of grazing land, for example on land on the sides of hills, or land which has many rocky outcrops, trees etc.

And what will happen when South Africa's rivers, on which waters a significant number of farmers and riparian residents depend, are so heavily polluted that the water is dangerously unsuitable for use?

If you doubt that this is possible take a drive down to Parys and try to enjoy an *al fresco* lunch near the Vaal River. You may as well take your picnic into a school toilet, such is the miasma that wafts up from the river, courtesy of the wholesale dumping of untreated sewage and chemical effluent that takes place upstream between Three Rivers and the Barrage.

On page 11 we report that the SA National Defence Force teams deployed to get broken sewerage plants in the Vaal Triangle operating again (and you know you've sunk to a special new low when your national fighting force is reduced to fighting poo) have stopped work through lack of necessary funds, reported to be some R873 million, and the rot, so to speak, is so widespread anyway that NONE of Gauteng's rivers flow clean, and the muck, visible and chemical, eventually makes its way out to sea.

The outcome is that the oceans will be choked, and will die. Already we have the spectre of "gyres" of floating plastic garbage, some thousands of square kilometres in extent, that slowly revolve in the centres of our oceans, shedding little bits occasionally as their plastics slowly degrade, thence to sink gently to the bottom of the ocean, sometimes being snapped up by marine species as food.

A corollary would be to ask: what will happen when all the fish die out, not through over-exploitation, but because of pollution?

And it is worth noting here that while the Democratic Alliance crows about how well it runs the City of Cape Town, much of the town's effluent discharges direct and untreated into the sea off the Atlantic seaboard, and has done for decades.

And what will happen when, in a few generations' time, the last of the earth's oil has been sucked out of oil wells, or fracked out of places like the Karroo, or scraped out of the tar sands of northern Canada?

Hopefully, mankind will have embraced the rapidly-developing science of solar power, to drive everything from ships to trucks and cars, homes and businesses.

One thing is for certain, at this stage, is that the pace of life will be very much slower and more insular, for unless some new form of long-distance transportation can be devised, such as teleportation, the only way your offspring will be able to take long-distance overseas trips will be by sea, like in the days before the modern jet airliner.

And what will happen when the last of the world's honeybees die off through disease, willful destruction, starvation and poisoning?

Although it is true that bees are not the only insects that pollenate plants, they are by far the most proficient and prolific, and their demise will make it impossible for a vast range of crops to reproduce and form the fruits that humans enjoy ~ everything from beans in the vegetable patch to peaches in the orchard.

Will we be reduced to pollinating these crops by hand, as they do in parts of China where bees are already extinct? Without appearing flippant, hand pollination would be a sure-fire remedy for South Africa's unemployment crisis, as armies of workers would be required to move slowly from plant to plant or tree to tree dabbing blossoms with little silk brushes. But imagine the cost of such an exercise!

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Ditching Eskom: Not so easy

Sir ~ Firstly, thanks for a great magazine, I never miss an issue and always find the articles informative and interesting.

I would like to respond to a letter published in the February 2019 edition titled

Help with otters

Sir ~I would like to help the reader who wants to get rid of the otters humanely.

On her pond she can plant

"No more Eskom woes for R140 000".

Although we are all fed-up with Eskom and would love to give them the middle finger the solution is not as simple as people seem to think. Going off grid is far more expensive

lemon grass and she can also use fly repellent around her yard and the otters will run away.

Simon Bishop

By email

than people realise and they should be extremely careful of listening to someone that is telling them only what they want to hear. Proper research is the key before deciding what to do.

Some considerations below:

☐ Batteries can last ten years but only under ideal conditions. This means not discharging below 50%, not overcharging, correct temperature control, etc.

Also, if one battery goes "bad" it will overload the

others and shorten the life of the rest. Realistically you can possibly look at two to five years maximum. If the supplier is not willing to guarantee the batteries for ten years, don't plan on them lasting ten years.

Where are you going to house the batteries? They need to be ventilated and kept out of the elements so add the building cost of a battery room to the bill.

☐ Solar panels need to be

Continued on page 9

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MAILBAG

From page 5

facing the correct direction and be exposed to the sun. What are your insurance costs on these as they are completely exposed to the elements (consider hail and strong winds)? How long will it take to replace should they get damaged; what will you do in the interim, and who will pay for it?

❑ What are your contingency plans for a week of rain? I would assume a generator will be the logical answer. What is the purchase price and what are the running costs on this? A friend says he spends R250-R300 a day for fuel for his generator. Bear in mind it needs fuel and regular services.

My generator needs an oil change every 100 hours. This means four days of continuous running and you need to service it! Will you service it yourself or do you need to pay someone to do it?

❑ What are your solutions for your high energy items, eg, geyser, stove and kettle?

These will not run off solar so you will need to install gas operated geysers and stoves. Consider adding the installation, maintenance and running cost of these to your budget.

Forget about operating washing machines, tumble driers and dishwashers in the morning as your batteries will be depleted from overnight usage.

Do you have a swimming pool, borehole pump, pressure pump or a small workshop for DIY? Will the system even run a small welding machine for repairing your security gate?

These are a few of the things that need to be carefully considered before going off-grid.

Realistically you need to budget for about R400k + for a system that can accommodate a standard family home with no disruptions and no major change to your power usage habits or inconvenience.

An article I read in *Popular Mechanics* a few years ago said that if you buy low energy lighting, energy efficient appliances and use energy saving devices such as solar geysers or geyser timers (all things you would need to do anyway if you were off-grid) there would be little to no saving in costs.

Those that say they are saving the environment do not consider the environmental damage caused by the manufacture of the solar panels and batteries as well as the damage caused when they are discarded or recycled (think greenhouse gas emissions and mining operations for raw materials). Consider this: If solar panels are so effective and cheap, why do the factories that produce them not use them? In my opinion a hybrid system of solar, gas and grid power is the best solution, especially if you can feed back into the grid.

This gives you the electricity saving as well as the convenience of supply when you need to run your high-power items. You also can reduce the size of your battery banks to just supply you with emergency power as and when you need it. This system also

Continued on page 11



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It's not only Eskom that has trouble shaking money out of consumers and municipalities for its services. Rand Water, which supplies bulk drinking water to 17 municipalities in Gauteng, Mpumalanga, North West and the Free State, also has a

MAILBAG

From page 9

comes with a price tag though. The long and short of it is that there is no cheap and simple solution to our Eskom woes. If you want to give them the middle finger it will come at a cost not only in cash but also inconvenience. Do your research properly and consider all the angles before committing yourself to your path.

Richard Albrecht
by email

big problem with municipalities in arrears with their payments.

As of late January, it was owed R708 million in arrears. Worst offender is the Victor Khanye Municipality in Mpumalanga, where water flow has been reduced 60%, impacting the surrounding areas of Delmas, Botleng, Eloff and Sundra. It owes Rand Water about R86 million in arrears.

Another baddie, also in Mpumalanga, is the Bushbuckridge Municipality, which has had its water flow reduced by 20%.

This is not the first time that Delmas has been in a municipal mess. In 2005 we reported how, as a result of a breakdown in the town's sewerage works, residents were becoming ill, with some dying, of typhoid, among

other ailments, as a result of contaminated water supplies.

Meanwhile, down south in the Vaal Triangle, efforts by the SANDF to restore Vereeniging's sewerage works to functioning order so that raw sewage no longer flows freely into the Vaal River, have reportedly ground to a halt

because of a lack of funds.

The SANDF has appealed to private business for assistance with the crisis and to people in the area to stop vandalising pump stations. Apparently, R873 million is needed to continue with the project, which includes

Continued on page 12

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NEWS

B-BBEE? Get your R20m grant here

If you are Black, or can prove you are a B-BBEE Level 1-4 entity, and operate in Gauteng, you could qualify for a grant of up to R20 million from the Dept of Trade & Industry as part of its Agri-Processing Support Scheme (APSS) which it runs in conjunction with the

Gauteng Dept of Agriculture & Rural Development (Gdard).

But you must act quickly because the deadline for the current round of applications is March 31.

The APSS aims to stimulate investment by South African agro-processing and benefici-

ation (agri-business) enterprises. The investment should demonstrate that it will achieve some increase "in capacity, employment creation, modernised machinery and equipment, competitiveness and productivity improvement and broadening participation."

The scheme offers a 20% to a 30% cost-sharing grant to a maximum of R20 million over a two-year investment period, with a last claim to be submitted within six months after the final approved milestone.

The department may consider an additional 10% grant for projects that meet all economic benefit criteria such as employment, transformation, geographic spread and local procurement.

The maximum approved grant may be utilised on a combination of investment costs provided the applicant illustrates a sound business case for the proposed investment activities.

The relevant application forms and related documents can be viewed and downloaded at https://www.thedti.gov.za/financial_assistance/financial_incentive.jsp?id=69&subthemeid.

For more information: Suzan Chiloane, tel 012 394 1208, Semakaleng Mangwedi tel 012 394 1073 or Rinny Mmakau tel 012 394 1618.

NEWS

From page 11
rebuilding a collapsed wastewater system.

Residents have been advised not to drink water from the Vaal River due to pollution. Officials are reported as saying "various levels of government are tackling the crisis."

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Gauteng mucks in for Kimberley birds

When next you drive into Kimberley from Gauteng on the N12, look to your right just before you enter the town. There, beyond the railway line, you'll see a small dam. That's Kamfer's Dam, and if you approach the town in the summer months you may be lucky enough to see it filled with hundreds of pink lesser flamingoes. Not this year, however.

Rather, you would have seen a dried up mudflat filled with dying, starving flamingo chicks abandoned by their parents. And, after some Kimberley conservationists raised awareness of the crisis, you would also have observed groups of volunteers collecting the chicks, for transport and rehabilitation at



Rescued flamingo chicks

of which made calls for volunteers to help feed and clean the birds, in the hope that survivors, when strong

enough, could be returned to the dam to become healthy adults.

Estimates of the number of chicks rescued vary from 1 000 to 2 000.

This is not the first controversy or crisis to affect Kamfer's Dam. For a number of years conservationists have been fighting with developers and the Kimberley municipality over proposed housing developments along its

Continued on page 17



Lesser flamingoes on Kamfer's Dam

animal rescue centres and zoos around the country. Among the facilities in Gauteng that received batches of chicks were the Pretoria Zoo, and the Lory Park Zoo in Glen Austin, both

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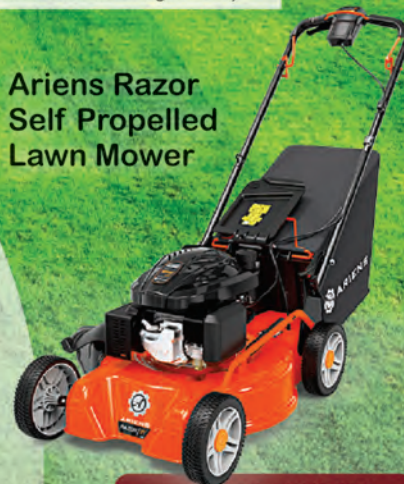
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ISSA ditches 2019 invasives courses

Over the past five years the Invasive Species South Africa (ISSA) organisation claims to have trained some 4 000 individuals, elaborating on the laws that apply to alien and invasive species and enabling them to identify invasive species throughout the country.

However, this year the Nemba Alien & Invasive Species (AIS) Regulations are undergoing a major update and are only expected to be gazetted later in 2019.

As a result, ISSA has decided not to do any further training

until the new regulations have been promulgated. Once this happens, an entirely updated series of invasive species training will be scheduled.

In the meantime, the *Gauteng Smallholder* will continue to highlight the challenges that environmentalists face in dealing with the threats posed by alien and invasive species.

It is, by law, up to smallholders (and in fact all landowners) themselves to eradicate invasives from their plots. For the published lists of invasive and prohibited amphibians, birds, fish, mammals, plants and reptiles

go to the *Gauteng Smallholder* website.

For clarity, invasive species are divided into four categories:

❑ Category 1a: Invasive species which must be combatted and eradicated. Any form of trade or planting is strictly prohibited.

❑ Category 1b: Invasive species which must be controlled and wherever possible, removed and destroyed. Any form of trade or planting is strictly prohibited.

❑ Category 2: Invasive species, or species deemed to be potentially invasive, in which a permit is required to carry out a restricted activity. Category 2 species include commercially important species such as pine, wattle and gum trees.

❑ Category 3: Invasive species which may remain in prescribed areas or provinces. Further planting, propagation or trade is however prohibited.

FLAMINGOS

From page 15 shoreline, which they believe will irreparably damage one of the very few breeding grounds in South Africa of the Lesser Flamingo, for which it has become famous.

Rather than damage from housing development, however, this year's crisis was caused by two factors, namely the current drought, and a reduction in the volume of artificially-produced water being pumped into the dam which, of necessity for flamingo breeding, is very shallow.

The good news is that the current crisis was relatively short-lived, and rains in the area in February saw water

entering the dam once more in sufficient volume to render it a suitable habitat for flamingoes once more.

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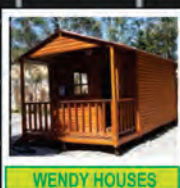
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Insects are dying, and we're to blame

Recently the Biological Conservation journal published a comprehensive review of 73 reports of insect decline from across the world, including South Africa. The authors analysed the papers with a view to identifying what is causing the decline in different families of insects.

More than 40 percent of insect species are declining ~ and the rate of extinction is about eight times faster than that affecting birds, mammals and reptiles. Based on current trends, some insects could be extinct within two decades, while some have already been lost. If nothing is done to halt this decline, they will all be extinct within a century. The authors of the review, Francisco Sánchez-Bayo and Kris Wyckhuys observe, "As insects comprise about two thirds of all terrestrial species on Earth, the above trends confirm that the sixth major extinction event is profoundly impacting life forms on our planet."

Of insects that live on land, *Lepidoptera* (moths & butterflies), *Hymenoptera* (comprising the sawflies, wasps, bees, and ants) and dung beetles (*Coleoptera*) are the taxa (categories of organisms) most affected. Four aquatic (living on or in water) taxa are endangered and have already lost a large proportion of species. Of the 155 *Odonata* (Dragonfly and Damselfly) species recorded

Review of studies worldwide shows more than 40% of species are declining, and extinction rate is 8 times faster than for birds, mammals and reptiles

in South Africa, 13 are declining and four were extinct by 1990. According to the review, a large proportion of studies (49.7%) point to habitat change as the main driver of insect declines, a factor equally implicated in global

bird and mammal declines. Increasing human populations means more land is cleared to build houses, factories and transport systems, as well as to grow food. Agriculture does not only cause habitat change though. Major insect declines

occurred when agricultural practices shifted from traditional, low-input farming style to the intensive, industrial scale production brought about by the so-called Green Revolution ~ the large increase in crop production achieved by the use of artificial fertilisers, pesticides and high-yield crop varieties.

Continued on page 21

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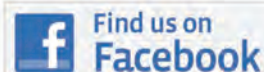
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From page 19

The latter practices did not necessarily involve deforestation or habitat modification (eg, grassland conversion, drainage of wetlands) but rather entailed the planting of genetically-uniform monocultures, the recurrent use of synthetic fertilisers and pesticides, the removal of hedgerows and trees in order to facilitate mechanisation, and the modification of surface waterways to improve irrigation and drainage. Monocultures led to a great simplification of insect biodiversity among pollinators, insect natural enemies and

'Monocultures led to a great simplification of insect biodiversity among pollinators'

nutrient recyclers, and created the suitable conditions for agricultural pests to flourish. A quarter of the reports indicate these agriculture-related practices as the main driver of insect declines in both terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems.

Conversely, the change from intensive farming to organic farming has led to increases in abundance and diversity of moths while the abandonment of grazing land has allowed the recovery of some common butterflies.

Agricultural intensification also entails stream channelisation, draining of wetlands, modification of floodplains, and removal of riparian canopy cover with subsequent loss of soil and nutrients ~ all resulting in homogenisation of stream microhabitats and

alteration of aquatic insect communities.

The review cites pollution as the second major driver of insect declines. Sources of environmental pollution include fertilisers and synthetic pesticides used in agricultural production, sewage and landfill leachates from

urbanised areas and industrial chemicals from factories and mining sites. Biological factors such as invasive pests and pathogens also contribute to insect decline. A global meta-analysis revealed how in 56% cases, invasive plants had negative effects leading to a reduction in the overall abundance, diversity and

Continued on page 23



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BEEKEEPING

They're small, but deadly

Although statistics show that only about ten people a year die in South Africa from flying insect stings (wasps, bees and hornets together), the venom of a bee is, potency for potency, much more poisonous than that of even the most poisonous reptile. The saving grace, if there is one, is that the quantity injected by a single bee sting is infinitesimal compared to the quantity injected by, say, a black mamba or boomslang. So, unless one is highly

allergic to bee venom (and there is often only one way to find out, and that's to be stung by a bee), the chances of one being fatally stung by a single ~ or even a few ~ bees, is pretty small.

But it's another story entirely if one is attacked by an enraged swarm, as an elderly Johannesburg woman discovered to her mortal cost in 2005, when she accidentally drove into an electricity substation that had been colonised by an enormous

Continued on page 26

ENVIRONMENT

From page 21

fitness of different organisms, including insects.

The warming trend due to climate change will cause changes to insect populations, negatively impacting on some species.

According to this review, "The conclusion is clear: unless we change our ways of producing food, insects as a whole will go down the path of extinction in a few decades. The repercussions this will have for the planet's ecosystems are catastrophic to say the least, as insects are at the structural and functional base of many of the world's ecosystems since their rise at the end of the Devonian period, almost 400 million years ago."

The authors state that habitat restoration, coupled with a drastic reduction in agro-chemical inputs and agricul-

tural redesign, is probably the most effective way to stop further declines, particularly in areas under intensive agriculture. For aquatic insects, rehabilitation of marshlands and improved water quality are a must for the recovery of biodiversity. Biodiversity refers to the need for the variety of plant, animal and micro-organic life in a particular habitat and the ecological complexes of which they are part. Insects account for about 66% of all known species and constitute more than three-quarters of global biodiversity.

The document is titled Worldwide Decline of the Entomofauna: A review of its Drivers, and it can be downloaded from www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0006320718313636.

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BEEKEEPING

From page 23

swarm which, enraged at being disturbed by the crash, attacked her en masse, killing her.

There is also no doubt that some bee-related deaths are occasioned by thieves and vandals who raid the hives for honey, unprotected, without smokers etc. In such cases they may not escape the consequent enragement of the swarm and thus suffer fatal injury by the number of stings they receive, or they may simply be unaware that they are allergic and succumb unwittingly to a relatively small number of stings.

The African honeybee, of which there are two sub-species, *Apis mellifera scutellata* (found naturally in the summer rainfall region of the country) and *Apis mellifera capensis* (found in the winter rainfall region), is notoriously aggressive and particularly so when the swarm is protecting a store of honey.

Certainly, the African bee is much more aggressive than its European or North American counterpart where one often sees beekeepers in the northern hemisphere going about their tasks in the apiary bare-armed and gloveless with only a hat and bee veil as protection.

No South African beekeeper in his or her right mind would go anywhere near a hive unless fully suited and booted, with arms and hands encased in thick, impenetrable rubber gloves.

And even then it is not uncommon for bees to attack one through one's bee suit, necessitating one wearing

layers of clothing underneath the suit as additional protection, which makes the hobby or business of beekeeping in South Africa a hot and sweaty one indeed. Some South African beekeepers even sew pockets on to the insides of their bee suits into which they slide ice packs in an attempt to keep themselves cool.

One study of the comparative aggression of African and European bees saw a scientist enrage a swarm of each type at a time by poking around in the hive with a stick and, when attacked, running away while pushing one of those distance measuring wheels in front of him. When the bees eventually stopped giving chase he noted the distance from the hive thus covered. The African variety, he found, had chased him some three times further than the European bees, a distance of more than a kilometre.

Apart from disturbing the hive wilfully, by opening it at a silly time, or dropping it for some reason, it is very possible to enrage one's swarm unwittingly.

The smell of petrol fumes, and the buzzing sound of a small engine such as a lawnmower or brushcutter near the hive is a sure-fire way to enrage a swarm and provoke an attack, and many are the tales of lawnmowers being abandoned in the middle of nowhere by their operators, there to buzz away by themselves till their fuel tanks dry out, while the

Continued on page 27

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BEEKEEPING

From page 26

angered bees repeatedly attack like squadrons of frenzied Stukas and Messerschmidts, the operators having scarpered in great haste.

One of the further dangers of beekeeping, and therefore one of the hazards of the business, is that many who start off with little or no reaction to bee stings (apart from the burning pain and a little swelling) lose their "immunity" over time as they are stung, and thus become mildly or even severely allergic.

Of course, even African bees

are not always aggressive, and this sometimes lulls people into a false sense of security. For example, if you see bees foraging for pollen or nectar in your flowers you can usually be sure that they will leave you alone unless you stand on one or annoy it by brushing it off the flower etc. They have, after all, an important job to do at that stage, on which they are concentrating, and that's to gather food for the hive.

Similarly, even when working with the hive, there are times of the day, conditions of weather and times in the life-cycle of the swarm during which they are calmer. Particularly hot weather, or the hot brightest time of the day, or strong wind or thunder and lightning can put a swarm on edge, as can inept handling when opening the hive, or the use of insufficient calming smoke, or the wrong kind of smoke, from one's

smoker.

Indeed, Lesson No1 of beekeeping is that smoke, and lots of it, is one's best friend when working with one's hives. Smallholders can join one of three beekeepers associations in Gauteng. The Northern Beekeepers Association (known as "Northerners") caters for beekeepers around Pretoria. For details call Riekie on 082

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The Southern Beekeepers Association ("Southerners") covers Johannesburg, West Rand and southern Gauteng. Email Lantz at info@beekeepers.co.za for details. The Eastern Highveld Beekeepers Association ("Easterners") caters for beekeepers on the East Rand, and Mpumalanga. Call Mike on 083 430-8707 for details.

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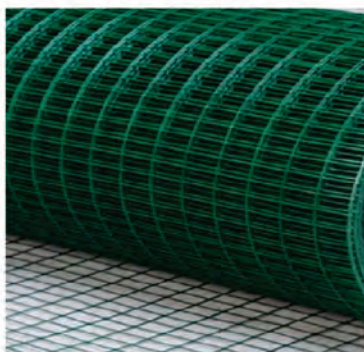
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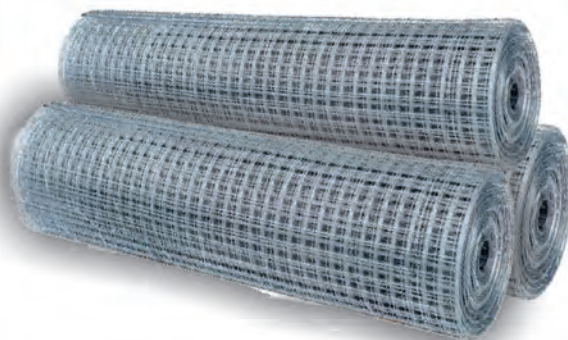
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Gauteng's shocking pink invasion

The late rains over Gauteng this summer did nothing to impede the progress across the province of the alien invasive *Campuloclinium macrocephalum*, commonly known as Pompom weed, which is steadily taking over Gauteng road verges and veld, and which has extensively colonised the Tshwane Metro-run Rietvlei Nature Reserve south-east of Pretoria. Pompom weed is a South American asteraceous herb

that was probably introduced into South Africa in the 1950s as a garden ornamental. It was first recorded as a naturalised weed in the 1960s and was still at low levels well into the 1990s, but over the past 20 years it has steadily spread eastwards across the grassland biome.

Last year Sanbi released its report, "The Status of Biological Invasions & Their Management in South Africa" where it indicated that the rate of spread of invasive species is typically slow as the species establishes, then rapid as it colonises new areas. Pompom weed has increased in range by 670% in 15 years. Pompom weed is a perennial, erect herb up to 1.5 m high. The stems and leaves are covered with rough, bristly hairs. Leaves are scattered

along the length of the stem but clustered at the base to form a rosette. The plant forms an underground network of tuberous storage roots from a central crown which enables continued growth after the dry season. In spring shoots arise from, and in autumn die back to,

the rootstock. The showy pink flower heads (inflorescences) are produced in dense clusters at the ends of the aerial stems, and look like bright-pink powderpuffs. Each flower head, measuring 15 mm long x 25 mm wide, consists of hundreds of tiny,

Continued on page 31

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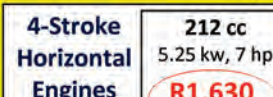
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INVASIVES



Pretoria's Rietvlei Nature Reserve is losing grazing to pompom weed.

From page 29

star-shaped florets (individual "flowers") surrounded by purple bracts (brightly coloured, leaf-like scales). A long protruding style from each floret gives the flower head a fluffy appearance. Mature florets each produce a single-seeded dry fruit (achene) with a tuft of brown hairs that promotes wind dispersal.

The plant initially establishes itself in disturbed sites such as roadsides, but then invades natural grasslands, open savanna and wetlands. It displaces native species, reducing both the biological diversity and carrying capacity of vleis and veld. It is tolerant of a wide range of growing conditions and is able to establish itself in most soil types.

The weed is fiendish in its ability to endure and multiply. It survives fires and frost during the winter months because all of its living components are in a dormant state underground. Under drought conditions during summer it can revert to a dormant state by withdrawing its nutrients from the shoots back to the

roots.

It is unpalatable, so will not be eaten by livestock.

Smallholder readers will recall that back in 2015 we wrote about the release of the pompom thrip *Liothrips tractabilis* in Gauteng, including at Rietvlei.

Liam van der Westhuizen of the Plant Protection Research unit of the Agricultural Research Council reported recently that the ARC released the thrips at a number of sites within the reserve, with mixed results. She observed, "Where the thrips have established they tend to have a rather impressive impact on the plant in terms of height and flower production. The latter being the aim for us with the thrips, as this will ultimately limit the seed rain at the end of the season. Observations from other sites seem to suggest that the thrips disperse rather slowly and they need time to reach a critical mass before they will disperse. And similar to the other insects out there they too are preyed on by ants and spiders among other things."

Continued on page 33

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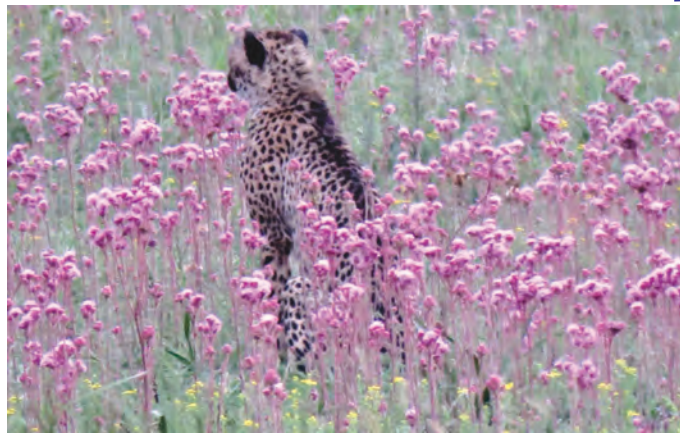
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According to the ARC, since the initial release, more than 100 000 thrip adults and nymphs have been released in over 45 localities throughout Gauteng, Limpopo, Mpumalanga and North West. Follow-up surveys and feedback from landowners have confirmed the persistence of the insects, and methods are currently being investigated to increase their dispersal within and between pompom infestations.

There is also a rust which is a natural enemy of the weed. The *Puccinia eupatorii* rust fungus seems to have an impact on the seedlings and



Rietvlei Nature Reserve has a family of cheetah. And pompom weed. Lot and lots of pompom weed... (Picture: Ria Viljoen)

any strain that is placed on a plant will tap into the reserves. Over time, continuous pressure will force the plant to invest more resources into replacing leaves, tapping into reserves that could have been allocated to budding and seed formation.

Friends of Rietvlei committee botanist Marianne Strohbach last year compiled a comprehensive invasive plant species strategy for the reserve, in

which she stated that pompom must be treated as "enemy no 1". It threatens prime grazing and the hair on the plant causes skin irritations to man and animals. She concedes that it is almost impossible to control mechanically due to its robust root system and copious seed production. Herbicide application is expensive and labour intensive but she feels that an initial larger investment will make follow-up

control and maintenance management much more cost-efficient and effective. She went on to describe control methods best practice. A holistic approach is also required, aiming to maintain the natural vegetation in a healthy, productive state as this limits pompom invasion. This may require a combination of additional control methods, including mowing or burning combined with

Continued on page 35

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INVASIVES

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grass over-seeding to increase desirable grass cover.

The Friends of Rietvlei group does not have the resources to combat the pompom weed and Strohbach submitted the document to the environmental department of the Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality, the owner of the reserve.

Sources at the metro admitted that "this is the most problematic invader of our time." However, they feel that a definitive solution has not been found, despite a great deal of research on the weed. As the problem is so complex, the department is very cautious as doing the wrong thing could compromise the whole grassland. According to the National Environmental Management (Biodiversity) Act (Nemba for short) the municipality is required to develop invasive species monitoring, control and eradication plans.

In general the municipality works together with the national Dept of Environmental Affairs and the Dept of Agriculture regarding the Nemba and Conservation of Agricultural Resources Act (Cara) legislative requirements.

The metro states that it has been running experiments on Rietvlei and monitoring these sites for at least eight years, to investigate the best control method. "We have had teams from Working for Water, own contractors and staff to assist

in the retaining of the plants in certain areas."

Currently the City of Tshwane states that it is doing the following within its capacity and budget available:

- ☐ Treating individual plants with herbicides on priority areas;
- ☐ Preventing seeds forming and distributing where resources are available;
- ☐ Introducing biological control agents. However, it admits that, "unfortunately up till now, none of these

introductions seems to be of great success."

Towards the end of last year the city put out a tender for the appointment of a service provider for the removal of alien invasive plants. It is hoped that this resource will be made available in the next financial year. The municipal officials do make the point that private landowners have the

responsibility of ensuring that they address any alien invasives on their property.

Pompom is so very efficient at

Continued on page 36



A Working for Water team spraying pompom weed.



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INVASIVES

From page 35

spreading its seeds, so everybody must play their part in the battle.

As pompom is a Category 1 weed in terms of the Cara, any land user is bound by law to remove it.

Thus, if you or your neigh-

bour fails to comply with the regulations, a criminal case may be brought against you and the national Dept of Agriculture (Daff) may issue a directive setting a date by when the property must be cleared. The municipality is only allowed to issue

notifications in this regard. Landowners should also be proactive in maintaining the natural vegetation on their properties, keeping it in a healthy, productive state, as this will also help to limit pompom invasion.

According to Strohbach, "Ploughing or deep ripping is not advisable on a large scale as this will damage the pompom rootstock, stimulating further vegetative growth and denser stands. However, smaller and/or individual plants should be uprooted, ensuring that the crown (swollen area with resprouting buds) and as much of the tuberous rootstock as possible is removed."

She further notes that when uprooting an individual plant, one must dig carefully so that the rooting system is not fragmented or broken but removed in its entirety with the crown and attached

tubers. This will ensure that plants cannot regrow.

According to the ARC, three herbicides are currently registered for use on pompom weed:

☐ Brush-Off (metsulfuron methyl 600 g/kg) made by DuPont.

☐ Access 240 (picloram 240 g/litre), by Dow AgroSciences, registered as a foliar treatment.

☐ Climax, metsulfuron methyl (sulfonyl urea) 600 g/kg, by Volcano Agroscience, also registered as a foliar treatment.

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They look hardy, but...

Whether you see them growing naturally on some wild rocky outcrop or stacked up, almost rootless, against a bakkie or a trailer awaiting sale on the side of a road, aloe plants look so hardy. They are, however, susceptible to a number of pests. Snout beetles are particularly troublesome, so quick and decisive action is required whenever they are noticed. The adults feed off of aloe leaves, aiming at the centre of the aloe plant where they can wedge themselves between the leaves to insert their proboscis. They drink the sap and leave a tell-tale dark spot that dries into a pea-sized dry spot with a puncture mark in the middle. They then lay their eggs at the base of aloe leaves and when the larvae have hatched, they bore into the stem just below the crown, which usually results in the death of the plant. Be on the lookout for dying leaves and black colouring in the centre of the crown. In large aloes, eggs will sometimes be laid in the base of a leaf and occasionally eggs will be deposited in the stem below a leaf, so it is necessary to check under leaves as well. If the rot is not too far advanced it may be possible

Tough desert plants fall victim to plenty of pests and diseases

to stop the infestation with a long-lasting, systemic insecticide such as Bandit (Kohinoor) or the more natural Biogrow Pyrol. If it is too late for that, remove the centre leaves of the crown ~ they usually come out easily because they are starting to rot. You will probably have to

remove a few of the surrounding leaves as well. Using a screw driver or other similar weapon remove the mess of faeces and rot until you find the maggots, which you must destroy. It might help to wash out with a high pressure hose. The aloe should then produce its own gel, which will close the wound.

Continued on page 39



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IN THE GARDEN

From page 37

Cancer or gall presents as unsightly, deformed leaves and flower stalks. It is a viral infection that is highly contagious.

Aloe cancer is spread via mites and causes unsightly growths. If you don't act immediately the mites will spread to all your aloes and will be almost impossible to eradicate. Karbaspray (Carbaryl), Milbexknock

(Milbemectin) and Samba (Amitraz) do control these mites effectively if used properly.

It is best to alternate them.

Natural insecticides such as Biogrow, Pyrol, Bioneem and Neudosan can be used as a preventive spray, but must be applied more frequently. It is always best to physically remove the growths caused by the mite before spraying. Burn these growths ~ don't

leave them lying around your garden and don't put them in your compost heap.

Aloe plants are vulnerable to white scale, and if you see rows of small, white flat sucking insects on the leaves, action should be taken to get rid of them.

These insects are approximately 1-2mm in length. They are sap suckers and will gradually cover more and more of the leaf upper and

lower surface. Eventually this deprives the plant of sunlight to the extent that it can deteriorate and die.

They are stationary insects that are easy to kill, but they tend to remain where they are, creating the impression that the insecticide has had no effect on them.

If you have a high-pressure sprayer you can spray the scale off the leaves. Then

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Snout beetle

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IN THE GARDEN

From page 39

spray the leaves after a few days as a preventive measure against further infestation. Other methods include spraying with Spray & Cook or using a spray that contains oleum, which means the bugs will be suffocated. Try dipping a toothbrush in methylated spirit and scraping them off. Another option is to spray with a solution of soapy

water.

Black spot is a complex problem caused by more than one fungus and is more likely when plants are under stress due to excessive moisture or high temperatures combined with high humidity. The best product for home use is Chronos (Prochloraz) but excellent alternatives are Bravo720 (Chlorothalonil) and Fungi-Nil 500WP (Captan). As

a preventative try Neudorff's Copper Soap.

Rust is an aggressive fungus which results in spots on the leaves. Cut off all affected leaves and burn them before commencing spraying with any fungicide. Try hydrogen

peroxide as a full cover spray.

A solution at 6% (20 volume) used undiluted,

with the addition of some wetting agent (a few drops of dishwashing soap is a maplotter alternative) is effective. Or spray with Funginex (Triforine) or Bravo720

(Chlorothalonil).

Ants and aphids have a symbiotic relationship with aloes. The ants afford protection to the aphids in exchange for a sticky sweet substance, honeydew, which

Continued on page 41



Infestation of scale

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How to handle pesticides

Even the most cursory perusal of news media in recent years will have

given you some idea that pesticides and herbicides often have dangerous side

effects (think Roundup and its cancer-causing properties) and often, also, have long-

lasting devastating after-effects (think DDT and the build-up of residues in human and animal tissue). However, there are times when we have to bring out the big guns in the form of strong chemicals and, given the inherent dangers, we need to exercise great

IN THE GARDEN

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they excrete. Ants can actually be seen carrying aphids from plant to plant. Because aphids are sap feeders they may transmit serious diseases between the aloe and due to the fact that these pests puncture the plant they may cause the plant to rot if they are left unchecked, which is often the case as they hide among the leaves where one cannot see them. A variety of garden insecticide sprays and powders are effective in controlling this pest, as are some of the organic insecticides. Red spider mites are between 0.5-0.7 mm in length. They are reddish brown in colour

but some species may have different colours. They thrive in hot dry conditions and are often found on the underside of leaves.

Look at the lower surfaces of leaves as well as the yellowing of leaves. Red spider mites are sap feeders and plants that are infected often have leaves with fine yellow speckles on them. Another sign of infestation is the presence of fine web on the leaf.

An environment friendly remedy is to soak 20 cigarette "stompies" in one litre of water for a week. Strain and add 2.5ml liquid soap, which acts as a spreader/sticker, to

the cigarette water. Apply to infected plants. Sprays containing Oleum (Rape Oil) - 20ml/1l, will also help.

Continued on page 43



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ON THE PLOT

From page 41

caution in handling them. Firstly, labels are there for a reason. Read the label carefully.

Pesticides are chemicals used to control or repel pests. There are several kinds including herbicides, insecticides, rodenticides, and fungicides among others. Herbicides are used to control unwanted plants or



Spraying with a backpack sprayer

weeds. Insecticides are used to control harmful insects. Rodenticides are used to control mice, ground squirrels and pocket gophers. Fungicides are used to control certain plant diseases. Chemicals used to control pests can harm non-target species including people, livestock, pets, fish and wildlife. As a pesticide user, you have a responsibility to use pesticides according to the product label to reduce these risks.

The colour band and pictograms on the container tell you how to handle, apply and store a pesticide. The colour band also contains warnings concerning animals and the environment. The colour of the band indicates how hazardous or dangerous the pesticide is to people.

- ☐ Red – very toxic/toxic
- ☐ Yellow – harmful
- ☐ Blue – caution

☐ Green – not so dangerous Pesticides are often concentrated, which means that the product has yet to be added to water to dilute it, and it is at this stage that injuries are most likely to occur, ie while the chemicals are being mixed.

One common problem faced by home gardeners and smallholders is that many such chemicals are sold at concentrations, and in quantities, that are more suited to the convenience of the manufacturer than to the convenience of the user. These include formulations that are difficult to measure for mixing in small eight, ten or 16 litre hand-operated sprayers (but which are much more convenient when being mixed in, say, a 500 litre tractor-mounted PTO driven sprayer, as well as being packaged in quantities that no smallholder, with a few fruit trees or roses to spray, is

ever likely to finish before the compound's expiry date is reached.

Pesticide containers are opened during mixing and people who work with pesticides are sometimes less safety-conscious when they're mixing pesticides than when they're actually spraying them. They climb ladders, etc with open containers, lift and pour the pesticide, and they often work alone, which can be

Continued on page 45

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IN THE GARDEN

From page 43
dangerous.

Before mixing, check on the label for first aid instructions should they be necessary.

The label will also probably tell you what protective clothing you will need.

When handling pesticides you usually need to wear eye protection, rubber gloves, an overall and rubber boots.

After mixing and loading the pesticide, you should return any unused pesticide to its proper container. Securely close pesticide containers immediately after use.

Clean up all spills, no matter how small. Wash mixing and loading pails, measuring devices, stirring equipment and tools in strong detergent water.

While there are three causes of plant disease, only fungi can be controlled by dusting or spraying, and then only if action is taken early enough. Make sure that the correct

chemical for the specific disease that needs to be controlled is used (eg, listed on the container's label). It is important that the problem is identified correctly.

To be effective spraying must begin before the diseases appears or as soon as the first signs are noticed, so the spray places a protective layer on all surfaces of the plant.

For the elimination of pests, although pesticides can be useful, they also can be dangerous if used carelessly or are not stored properly.

When spraying with a hand sprayer you should first select a spray nozzle suited to the formulation being applied, as well as to the nature of the plant itself. Some nozzles deliver a straight, compact jet of fluid, while others emit a fine spray which might be suitable for covering a wide area of the plant's leaves and stems efficiently but which will also create inevitable

residual mist which can contaminate ponds, water troughs or beehives nearby.

You need to build up a good pressure and in most cases should spray at the plant from all angles, shaking the sprayer every now and then to ensure that the chemicals remain well mixed, which is particularly important when spraying an emulsion.

Never smoke or eat when using pesticides.

When you have finished, rinse the equipment in clear water, then let it air-dry and store it.

Wash your personal protective equipment (PPE) with detergent. Rinse it and hang it to air-dry. The wash and rinse water can best be disposed of by pouring it into the spray tank and applying it over a site allowed by the pesticide label. Remember to leave room for this rinse water, don't overfill the spray tank. Wash your clothing with

heavy-duty liquid detergent and hot water. Do not use bleach, which can cause a dangerous chemical reaction when mixed with ammonia. Dry the clothing on a line, where it will be exposed to sunlight. Take a hot shower using detergent-type soap, and don't forget to wash your hair.

Safe storage of pesticides is extremely important. Keep them locked away from children and animals.

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DIARY

ATTENTION CRAFT MARKETS, CLUBS ETC: If you would like details of your events included in the Diary, please fax or email your information to the Editor. For non-commercial enterprises this service is FREE.

NOTE: FARMERS' & CRAFT MARKETS. For a listing of REGULARLY HELD markets and fairs please see the separate section on page 51. Only markets that are held infrequently are now listed in this calendar section.

Every Sunday

Cattle drive with City Slickers breakfast, Diamond X Cowboy Ranch, near Rayton. Call Rudan on 082 410-3180 horses@diamondxranh.co.za, www.diamondx.co.za., R500 per person.

Mnandi Methodist Church, 09:00, Mnandi Centre, cnr Tulip and Short Streets, Jen 012 651-5509. Gail 072 477-0708., A small community who worship together. We have a Youth and Children's church.

Premier Mine Presbyterian Church, Lower Oak Ave, Cullinan. Garden of Remembrance (Columbarium), 079 060-9990 or 012 734-1640, Worship and Sunday school. Holy Communion for all on the 1st Sunday of every month.

Every Monday

Alcoholics Anonymous. 'Courage to Change' Group meeting, 19:30, Benoni Agricultural Holdings, Marcus 082 042-7730. Warren 082 335-0049. Glen 072 239-

3024., If you want to drink – that's your problem! If you want to stop – that's our problem! No fees; no dues; just concerned fellowship.

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March

2: Bokkie Park Food & Craft Market at the Bokkie Park, Southvale Rd, Parkdene, Boksburg, 09h00 – 14h30. Crafts and food stalls, live entertainment, tea garden, pony and camel rides. Contact Janine 072 713 3332

2: National Dorper auction, Beestekraal, Rustenburg. Vleissentraal Ermelo. Call Peet Kruger 082 809-3836

4-8: Introductory Course in Small Stock Management, ARC Irene. Cost R3 200. Call Mr M Mthabela 012 672-9402

5: Grass identification course at African Land-use Training's farm, Modimolle. R850. For reservations email courses@alut.co.za

5-7: Advanced grass identification course at African Land-use Training's farm, Modimolle. R2 950. For reservations email courses@alut.co.za

6: New Moon

9: 11th Overvaal Dexter Club auction, Willem Prinsloo Agricultural Museum, Old Pretoria Road, Rayton. 70 animals of both sexes and different ages on offer. Contact Carel Wessels 083 826-8400, BKB van Wyk.

9: Onderstepoort Farmers Day, Onderstepoort, Pretoria North

9-10: 57th Walkerville Agricultural Show, Walkerville Showground, R82, Walkerville.

Call Pauline 072 146-9176

10-15: Introductory Course in Poultry Production, ARC Irene. Cost R3 200. Call Mr M Mthabela 012 672-9402

21: Full Moon

21: Autumn Equinox

21: Human Rights Day

26-28: Three-day basic agriculture course, Foundations for Farming @ African Blessings, Rustfontein Farm, Bronkhorstspuit. Course content includes Foundations for Farming Principles, Feed Your Family, Vegetable Gardens, Herb Cultivation, Compost Making, Practical Home Remedies, Poultry Production, Beekeeping, Agroforestry, Cover Crops etc. Contact Neill Jackson neill@foundationsforfarming.org or 082 407 6774

April

5: Planted pastures workshop in Afrikaans at African Land-use Training's farm, Modimolle. R850. For reservations email courses@alut.co.za

5: New Moon

6: Bokkie Park Food & Craft Market at the Bokkie Park, Southvale Rd, Parkdene, Boksburg, 09h00 – 14h30. Crafts and food stalls, live entertainment, tea garden, pony and camel rides. Contact Janine 072 713 3332

19: Full Moon

19: Good Friday

20: Bokkie Park Food & Craft Easter Market at the Bokkie Park, Southvale Rd, Parkdene, Boksburg, 09h00 – 14h30. Crafts and food stalls, live entertainment, tea garden, pony and camel rides. Contact Janine 072 713 3332

22: Family Day (Easter Monday)

27: Freedom Day

30: Leon Thom Jerseys auction, Hartbeespoort. Vleissentraal Ermelo

May

1: Workers' Day

4: Bokkie Park Food & Craft Market at the Bokkie Park, Southvale Rd, Parkdene, Boksburg, 09h00 – 14h30. Crafts and food stalls, live entertainment, tea garden, pony and camel rides. Contact Janine 072 713 3332

5: New Moon

7-9: Holistic veld management course at African Land-use Training's farm,



Modimolle. R2 950. For reservations email courses@alut.co.za

14-17: Nampo Harvest Day, Nampo Park, Bothaville district, Free State

18 Full Moon

27-31: Accredited veld management course at African Land-use Training's farm, Modimolle. R4 950. For reservations email courses@alut.co.za

June

1: Bokkie Park Food & Craft Market at the Bokkie Park, Southvale Rd, Parkdene, Boksburg, 09h00 – 14h30. Crafts and food stalls, live entertainment, tea garden, pony and camel rides. Contact Janine 072 713 3332

3: New Moon

16: Youth Day

17: Youth Day spillover

17: Full Moon

21: Winter Solstice

July

2: New Moon

6: Bokkie Park Food & Craft Market at the Bokkie Park, Southvale Rd, Parkdene, Boksburg, 09h00 – 14h30. Crafts and food stalls, live entertainment, tea garden, pony and camel rides. Contact Janine 072 713 3332

16: Full Moon

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Regular Gauteng Farmers' Food Markets

NOTE: This is a listing ONLY of markets held weekly. Markets held less frequently (eg 1st Saturday of each month) are listed in the DIARY section of the magazine and we urge readers to check each month for dates and events of interest. We would like this list of food markets to be as comprehensive as possible. If you know of farmers' food markets that are not listed here, please email us the contact details of the organisers, and details of the market. Only FOOD markets are included. Similarly, if you know of markets in this list that have CLOSED please inform us so that we can delete incorrect or outdated information. We invite you to tell us of your experiences when visiting these markets so that we can better inform our readers. Were they as advertised? Was the produce on sale plentiful, well-priced, well-presented and fresh? Email your comments to editor@gautengsmallholder.com

DAY	WHAT	WHEN	WHERE	CONTACT	WHAT TO EXPECT
Thursday					
Every Thursday	Bryanston Organic & Natural Market	09:00 - 15:00	40 Culross Road, Bryanston (off Main Road)	Konrad or Glenda 011 706 3671 glenda@bryanstonorganicmarket.co.za	Quality hand crafted goods, unique art and fresh organic and naturally grown produce.
Saturday					
Every Saturday	The Red Windmill Village Market	09:00 - 15:00	104 Main Road, Walkerville	082 627 3134 or 072 637 9355 Stalls: 082 641 8982	Fresh produce, food stalls, coffee shop, plants, arts & crafts, book etc.
Every Saturday	Waterfall Estate Farmers Market	09:00 - 15:00	Waterfall Estate, Waterfall Cor Midrand	Robyn 083 311 4768	Fresh produce, pickles, preserves and home industry & craft, food etc. Enquire about stall prices.
Every Saturday	Pretoria Boeremark	05:30 - 09:30	Moreleta Street entrance, Krige Street ext, Silverton	012 804 8031 or 079 987 1025	Fresh produce & traditional bazaar treats like jaffles, kailings with pap & boerewors rolls.
Every Saturday	Bryanston Organic & Natural Market	09:00 - 15:00	40 Culross Road, Bryanston (off Main Road)	Konrad or Glenda 011 706 3671 glenda@bryanstonorganicmarket.co.za	Quality hand crafted goods, unique art and fresh organic and naturally grown produce.
Every Saturday	The Hazel Food Market	08:00 - 14:00	Greenlyn Village Centre, Cor Thomas Edison & Mackenzie St, Menlo Park, Pretoria	Rietha 083 554 5636 www.hazelfoodmarket.co.za	Fresh produce straight from the producer. Coffee, eats on sale
Every Saturday	Walkerville Farmers Market	09:00 - 15:00	112 R82 Main Road, Walkerville	079 076 7680 info@wfmmarket.co.za	Fresh produce, arts & crafts, food court and kids play area.
Every Saturday	Walkerville Country Market	09:00 - 15:00	Walkerville Country Market @ the Showgrounds	Ivan 084 590 2312 market@walkervillesa.co.za	Fresh produce, crafter's market, food court, craft beer, kids play area and pet friendly.
Every Saturday	Bosheuvel Fresh Produce	10:00 - 19:00	54 Glory Road, Muldersdrift	Mitch 082 553 2846	Outdoor country experience working farm cattle, sheep pigs. Free range meat, cheese, eggs and poultry. Craft beer
Every Saturday	The Fresh Co-op Weekly Farmers Market	07:00 - 10:30	204 Allan Road, Glen Austin Halfway House, Gauteng	info.freshproducecoop@gmail.com 082 369 7755	Fresh produce, pickles, preserves, home industry, arts and crafts, food etc.
Every Saturday	Joji Real Food Market	08:30 - 13:30	Pirates Sports Club, 25 Braeside Road, Greenside	Ingrid 083 532 2992 jozirealfoodmarket@gmail.com	Outdoor pet & child friendly, organic vegetables, food, arts & crafts
Every Saturday	Waenhuiskrans Plaas / Farmers Market	08:00 - 14:00	Cor of Veda & Enkeldoorn Ave opposite Montana Traders and next to Kollonade Centre	Phil Jansen - 083 5050 329 or office 012 567 6076 to book a stall	Stalls: Food, arts and crafts Fresh produce, eggs, chicken, meat, fruit and veg, Kiosk, Maders Pies, coffee
Every Saturday	Glenfresh Farmers Market	08:00 - 12:30	118 Allan rd, Glen Austin	Stefan: 082 829 0185 market@glenfresh.co.za	Local naturally grown produce, hand crafted goods, home baked treats, raw honey, biltong
Sunday					
Every Sunday	The Red Windmill Village Market	09:00 - 15:00	104 Main Road, Walkerville	082 627 3134 or 072 637 9355 Stalls: 082 641 8982	Fresh produce, food stalls, coffee shop, plants, arts & crafts, book
Every Sunday	Fourways Farmers Market	10:00 - 15:00	Cor Montecasino Boulevard & William Nicol Drive, Fourways	011 465 0827 www.ffmarket.co.za	Get your groceries... in the garden!
Every Sunday	Carlington Food & Craft Market	09:00 - 15:00	The Bru House on the R563 Hekpoort-Krugerdsorp Road	For stalls 0827824142 Debbie.Prinsloo@outlook.com	Restaurant, live music, safe kids play area, safe parking

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It's the same, but it's different

I read an article in a British smallholders' magazine recently by two former townies who have moved to South Devon to live sustainably and away from the rat-race entitled "Ten things we have learnt about living on a smallholding". It made for interesting reading.

Of course, many of the things the two Brits have learnt on their patch of countryside don't apply to living on a plot in Gauteng. For example, in the UK one is very carefully controlled as to what one can do and build on one's land. Council permission is a must, even if you want to erect a greenhouse.

And, because of periodic outbreaks of mad cow disease, moving livestock over any distance at all in the UK is a legal and logistical nightmare.

Then there's the water issue. Here, we are pretty constantly short of water. It's a hot dry country we live in. There, one is pretty constantly trying to drain one's land of the excess, a failure of which will result in one's livestock suffering from foot rot and all manner of waterborne ailments.

But there are some aspects of smallholding life which we share and are probably common the world over.

For example, you will want to get to know your neighbours, from a security perspective, or to ensure you follow the correct procedures for firebreak preparation or fence repairs, but also because, if you have kids and they have kids, you will often find them messing about together on ponies, quad bikes or whatever. An instant friendship circle with, hopefully, not too many scraped knees or bust heads.

In the UK, too, country folk, when you get to know them, are unfailingly generous of their time and friendship.

Then there is the question of death. There is a lot of death on a plot. Dogs, cats and cage birds die of disease or old age.

Chickens keel over inexplicably, (or need their necks wrung), and sheep, goats, pigs and cattle all need to grace the family table at some time if they are not merely to be expensive, oversize housepets and lawnmowers. Here, we South Africans, even squeamish townie ones, have an advantage, as our workers are often from much more rural backgrounds that we are and come with an enviable skill-set when it comes to slaughtering animals and dressing carcasses.

If one has such employees, therefore, one can simply leave it up to them (although in my case I vowed that I would never ask anybody on my plot to do anything I wasn't prepared to do myself so I got my admirably-skilled farm worker to show me how it is done.)

Not that I slaughter my own animals any more. Not having a bandsaw, or meat cleaver etc meant that the spoilage factor, even under the tutelage of my farm worker, made the exercise wasteful. And, besides, even with the most atavistic will in the world I found the whole exercise somewhat nauseating, to the extent that I would become an involuntary vegetarian for a few days after. So nowadays I sell my surplus livestock on the hoof, and send my wife to the butcher with the takings to buy meat for the freezer.

In the UK, you do your own slaughtering with no helpful handlanger to guide you, or you find an abattoir that suits your purpose close by.

Still with livestock, on one aspect we differ, and that's the question of stock theft. There, one can leave one's animals out in the field, especially on warm nights. Here, such a practice would soon render them "takeaways" in no time.

Not that theft, stock or otherwise, is unknown there. My UK-based sister once watched from her seat aboard a train her Landrover being nicked from the station parking lot just as her commuter express from her country village to London began pulling out of the station. But another similarity we share is that one never stops learning on a smallholding. And, as a corollary, one is never, ever, idle on a plot.

And one's never too old to take advice from neighbours and experts around one, and neither should one be too clever or superior, because pride will come before the fall. Long ago, I was proudly (and probably pompously) showing a new smallholder friend, who professed to want to learn about fixing a Vaaljapie, around my own such tractor, having spent considerable time and effort stripping and painting the bodywork, and overhauling the engine before re-assembling it. I had been mildly puzzled, once I got the tractor started again, that it was running hot, and I put it down to the engine being tight and needing to be run in. He, however, peered at the engine, and the radiator, and asked, "Isn't your radiator fan on back to front?" Of course it was...



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