

GOOD TO KNOW



Mega spekboom labyrinth in the works

Stellenbosch will soon be home to the world's biggest labyrinth – 52 900 m², about the size of the Pyramid of Giza's footprint – made from 90 000 spekboom plants. The Great Labyrinth of Africa will be created using spekboom grown by Wonder Plant, an initiative launched by environmentalist and social activist Peter Shrimpton. Peter's aim when starting the business was to alleviate poverty in previously disadvantaged areas by helping people start and run their own spekboom nurseries.

Spekboom (*Portulacaria afra*) is an indigenous South African succulent that grows naturally in the drier regions; it's especially prolific in the Eastern Cape around Addo Elephant Park. It's adaptable to many different environments and is easy to propagate, but that's not all... For the amount of water that a spekboom uses, it's also the most efficient carbon guzzler in the world; even more efficient than a rainforest tree! One plant can absorb 8,5 kg of CO₂ in a year and can live for as long as 200 years.

The labyrinth will be a symbol of climate change awareness and will have 13 circuits leading into the centre. Its design is inspired by the Chartres Cathedral in France and it will be built in the new Stellenbosch Bridge Smart City development. Completion is anticipated towards the end of the year.

What is a labyrinth? Unlike a maze, you can't get lost – the paths in and out are clear. Paths lead towards a centre point through a multitude of twists and turns, designed to encourage mindfulness and symbolise the inward journey.

Help out! Every Saturday is volunteer day.

Where? East Hill Farm, Muldersvlei Road, Stellenbosch

Contact: ☎ 073 420 4161; ✉ info@heartcapital.co.za

Sources: ✉ greatlabyrinth.co.za; ✉ capetownetc.com

– Kyra Tarr



Dial-a-Picnic this autumn

Picnics are great fun, but they can be a hassle to organise. Dial-a-Picnic saves you the trouble and puts together beautiful picnics for you to enjoy with your loved ones. They have picnics for every occasion, from birthday parties to engagements and baby showers. Delivery and setup are on offer within a 25 km radius of Cape Town, Durban, Pretoria or Johannesburg.

Cost? From R130 per person for the Titbit Picnic. Bridal and baby shower packages from R3 300 for 20 people.

More information: ✉ info@dialapicnic.co.za; ✉ dialapicnic.co.za

– Kyra Tarr

THERE'S AN APP FOR THAT

Pack for a Purpose

Who doesn't love travelling and meeting wonderful people from all over our beautiful country and beyond? The app Pack for a Purpose will make your holidays even more meaningful.

Enter the destination where you'll be travelling to and the app will generate a region-specific list of affiliated welfare organisations and the items they require – anything from school supplies to old board games and sports equipment. Each affiliated partner has a designated drop-off point where you can hand in your donations when you pass through. It's as easy as making a bit of room in your suitcase!

For more information visit ✉ packforapurpose.org

– Kyra Tarr



JOHAN MARAIS



Spitting snakes

Why do certain snakes spit? The answer is simple: self-defence. The snake attempts to get its venom into the attacker's eyes, causing pain and temporary blindness, giving the snake time to escape.

The rinkhals is well known for its ability to spit. When cornered, it will raise its body off the ground and make a hood, which exposes two or three white bands on its chest. Then it rapidly flicks its head forward and spits.

Other prolific spitters include black and zebra spitting cobras, both native to Namaqualand and southern Namibia.

The Mozambique spitting cobra also makes a hood when threatened, but it has been known to spit from a concealed position without the initial warning.

The spitting mechanism is intricate. In other venomous snakes like a mamba or a boomslang, the exit holes in its hollow fangs point downward, but in a spitting snake, the holes are angled forwards. The snake uses muscles around the venom gland to force venom out of the fangs, which can be projected up to 3 m.

The further the venom travels, the greater the radius of the spray. When directed at a human, some of the venom might reach the face, arms and chest area, but it only does real damage if it gets into the eyes.

Spit venom is highly diluted – you can wash it off with soapy water from your arms or chest. But venom in the eyes causes immediate pain. Victims tend to keep their eyes closed or rub them – this is not a good idea. It's best to immediately rinse your eyes gently with water – not milk or urine as some believe. The victim should immediately go see a doctor, who will check for corneal damage and apply antibiotic cream to prevent ulceration.

Never use diluted antivenom to rinse the eyes! I have dealt with hundreds of cases in which people have had venom spat in their eyes, and every single one of them made a full recovery within three to four days after seeing a doctor.

Dogs often fall victim to spitting snakes too, and their eyes swell shut quickly. The same treatment applies – make sure you get your pooch to the vet as soon as possible.

– Johan Marais

For more information visit ✉ africansnakebiteinstitute.com

BY THE NUMBERS

Keeping tabs on our southern right whales

The Whale Unit of the University of Pretoria's Mammal Research Institute (MRI) will be conducting their annual aerial survey of southern right whales from 30 September to mid-October. This year celebrates the 50th anniversary of the surveys. It is one of the longest running data sets on any marine mammal worldwide. Here's what they've learnt over the years.

15 000

The global population of southern right whales.

6 000

The estimated regional abundance of southern right whales in South African waters.

2 300

The number of recognisable adult whales added to the MRI database over the past 39 annual surveys.

131

The number of females with calves spotted between Hawston and Witsand in August 2019.

60

The estimated number of reproductive females left when whaling was terminated in 1935.

6,5

The percentage at which southern right whale numbers have been increasing globally per annum, thanks to protection efforts off the coasts of South Africa, Australia and South America.

– Kyra Tarr

Source: ✉ up.ac.za