

Conservation Corner: September 2023

By Jane Doherty

The monthly Cape Bird Club Newsletter is introducing a new feature – a little column called “Conservation Corner” where we share bits of information related to improving biodiversity in the City. Articles must be short, pertinent to the month in which the newsletter is produced, and accompanied by photos. Any topic is welcome, provided it fits under the general theme. If you would like to contribute a piece, please contact dohertyjane@icloud.com. In the meantime, Jane kicks the column off with a suggestion for planting an interesting indigenous plant that supports birdlife in your garden.

August is the month when the “Kruidjie-roer-my-nie” (“Touch-me-not” or *Melianthus Major*) plant produces its magnificent, maroon inflorescences. The Afrikaans name for the plant refers to the fact that the leaves give off an unpleasant smell, warning that the plant is toxic to livestock. Birds love the plant for its nectar, however: this accounts for its English name, “Honey Flower”.



Photo: Jane Doherty

I was given one of these plants as a seedling a few years ago by Frances Taylor, one of the founders of Communitree. I was wanting to make my drought-stricken garden more sustainable and bird-friendly. As you can see in the photo, that little plant quickly

transformed itself into a thriving shrub, despite my garden’s sandy soil.

If you look closely at an inflorescence, you can see the little cups at the base of the individual flowers where birds collect nectar, brushing against the black stamens that hang just above, or pollinating the pistils which hang a little higher. At the moment the Southern Double-collared Sunbirds and Cape White Eyes are enjoying the flowers.



Photo: Jane Doherty

If you want to try out this plant in your garden, more information can be found here (<https://pza.sanbi.org/melianthus-major>).

This article first appeared in the Cape Bird Club Newsletter on 28 August 2023. This PDF version can be accessed on the Cape Bird Club website at:

<https://www.capebirdclub.org.za/conservation-corner/>