

Conservation Corner: Feb 2024

By Isabella Hayden

This is the second in our series of pieces about bird-friendly plants for the garden (last August we discussed “Kruidjie-roer-my-nie” or *Melianthus Major*). This month we profile a plant that isn’t that well known.

The ‘African Boxthorn’ (or *Lycium ferocissimum*) is an evergreen, drought-hardy shrub which occurs in coastal scrub, from Llandudno up the West Coast and across southern Africa. It’s not widely used as a garden plant but it’s very good for birds and a very effective barrier plant.

It grows up to 2.5 to 3m with a similar spread. Although it grows mostly in sandy or stony soils, it has done well in Rosebank clay, too. The roots are non-aggressive, but it has extremely vicious thorns – even the thorns have thorns! Excellent for security.



Photo:

https://www.jungledragon.com/specie/22725/african_boxthorn.html

The flowers are light blue to white, appearing any time from winter through summer. Southern Double-collared Sunbirds occasionally visit them for nectar. Orange-red fruits develop after the flowers, and all the fruit-eating birds enjoy them. And the leaves themselves are also eaten by birds – White-

backed and Red-faced Mousebirds feast on the leaves in summer.



Photo credit:

<https://wilderlands.earth/stories/tackling-african-boxthorn/>



Photo credit:

<https://www.teline.fr/en/photos/solanaceae/lycium-ferocissimum>

The thorns provide excellent protection for nests, and the Cape Sparrows in your garden build several nests in each shrub.

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