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Roaming cattle, flowers and the state of Knysna's verges

Municipality has promised zero-tolerance approach to wandering livestock

People & Places in the Garden Route

ELAINE KING

Cycling through the Cape Columbine Reserve next to Paternoster was unforgettable

The splendor of the flowering Canola fields in Swellendam herald the return of spring

Big news in Knysna this week is that the days of our roaming herds of cattle are allegedly over ... and that means my flowers might just be safe in future.

Since I came here 11 years ago, there has been an issue with cattle roaming Knysna.

While it's been fascinating to see how herds of them get right up to Knysna Heights, stroll down George Rex Drive as if they were going to the Heads, we have all got used to them.

I stopped planting flowers at our gate long ago because cows eat the whole plant or the pigs chomp them.

I actually like the cows because they mow the lawn and add a pastoral feel to living in Knysna.

Our neighbours, on the other hands, detest the cows.

They say they drop ticks and give their dogs and cats biliary and worms.

Apparently, a bull chased a woman in Knysna Heights.

Miraculously though is that nobody has been seriously injured or killed in the cow-versus-car incidents that have happened on the N2, especially near Nekkies.

Over the years, I have lost count of how many times this has happened and I've seen what a car looks like that hits a cow and it's a mangled wreck.

People who I have interviewed over the years have got terrible frights, but fortunately escaped unharmed except a few with whiplash.

There was some talk a couple of months ago that the municipality was going to find grazing land for these cows since they are owned by township farmers who shepherd them through town to the greenest grass.

There was an outcry from residents against the RDP farm and so now the powers-that-be have taken a paradigm shift in approach.

The Knysna municipality as of last week adopted a zero-tolerance approach to roaming livestock as part of its ongoing efforts to improve public safety, protect road users and ensure compliance with municipal bylaws, it says.

"The municipality has commenced with the impoundment of roaming cattle found on public roads and in other public spaces.

"Livestock owners are reminded of their responsibility to ensure that their animals are properly contained and do not pose a risk to motorists, pedestrians or surrounding communities."

While it wasn't specified, this presumably also applies to the pigs that dig up pavements to eat the roots of grass and plants, leaving a bulldozer trail behind them.

This is very disheartening for house-proud people who try to keep tidy verges.

Again, I gave up long ago on the verges which the municipality only mows once in a blue-moon anyway, and so the cows and pigs were quirky and welcome here.

I may not have minded the wandering livestock, but most residents do.

From now, on members of the public are encouraged to report roaming livestock by contacting the emergency services control room on 044-302-8911 or 060-998-6969.

Reports may also be submitted via email to public safety manager Siyasanga Vandala at svandala@knysna.gov.za .

"We appreciate your cooperation in helping to create a safer environment for all," the municipality says.

"Community vigilance and prompt reporting play an important role in preventing accidents and ensuring the effective enforcement of municipal bylaws."

So now on to flowers since they are popping up early on the Garden Route this year and since I can now cultivate some blooms since the cows are gone.

We've had enough rain, this winter feels to me like it's been a whole lot milder, and the signs of spring coming are everywhere.

There are tiny green shoots on trees which were naked during winter.

While it's still too early for those miraculous peach blossoms, I can feel the earth is shifting.

The Chincherinchee lilies are out.

The bulbs and the whole plant actually hide until spring and then they suddenly pop out of the ground, even on patches of lawn, with exquisite little white bell-like flowers.

It was my mom's favourite and it flowers the same time she died so I imagine they're sent by her.

We walked on the dunes at Buffalo Bay last weekend and the walk was peppered with the smiling yellow faces of the Bietou Bush.

This plant is native to the southern coast of SA and can be found in areas like the Garden Route, particularly in strandveld, fynbos, seafront, and grassland gardens and its main flowering time is winter, so I guess it's putting on its last show.

The vygie flower (Mesembryanthemums) is to be found everywhere on the Garden Route and the Western Cape.

It grows prolifically on the dunes of our local beaches and it's like a brilliant iridescent star amongst other vegetation.

My favourite one is the cerise colour, but among the fireworks in the fynbos these vygies come in a carnival of pink, purple, yellow, orange.

There are more than 1,600 species in the country and a whole lot of them are found in our area and the Cape Floristic region.

Along with the vygies, other fynbos plants on the Garden Route typically bloom during the spring months.

From now on, we can expect to see bursts of colour as the fynbos flowers, including ericas and other species, show themselves everywhere, alongside the roads and in the forests.

The biggest hint, though, that spring is on its way are the annual Canola flowers.

Canola oil and animal feed are made from the seeds of this plant, but for just a few weeks, August to September, the humble plant gets to be an aesthetic wonder.

Many of us who live here make a trip to Swellendam especially to see this extravaganza since it is only about two hours from George.

The Canola fields can be found all along the N2 highway between Hermanus and Mossel Bay including little towns along the N2 like Riviersonderend, Caledon, Onrus, Botriver, Swellendam and Riversdale.

Then there's the big one, when SA's wildflowers burst into bloom in one of nature's greatest shows on earth.

From now until the end of September, people trek to witness a natural marvel when the Cape West Coast, Cederberg and Namaqualand landscapes turn into a thick carpet of flowers in vivid colours.

There are so many options to enjoy the flowers.

The town of Darling hosts an annual wildflower show over the third weekend in September as it celebrates an integral part of the Cape Fynbos Kingdom.

This comprises renosterveld, sandveld and strandveld where more than 1,200 different species of flowers can be found.

You can flower-hunt as far as SANParks' Namaqua National Park to see the flowers and in particular the Namaqualand daisies this area is famous for.

Last year, I stayed at the Darling Lodge Guest House and it was a treat in all respects, the perfect place to stay in flower season.

Cycling through the Columbine Nature Reserve on Wow eBikes from Paternoster was an unforgettable experience.

Thing is, these flowers are at their best between 10am and 3pm when it's about 18°C or more.

If it's cold and miserable, the flowers sulk and stay closed, which is why it's ideal to spend more than one day.

Have a look at Cape Country Routes *info@capecountryroutes.com* for accommodation in flower regions, but also activities.

And get going if you are headed for the flowers because they have bloomed early and who knows how long they will be out.

On this happy note, I am going to plant an African daisy in my pavement pots and see how long it lasts.

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