

The Feeder That Took Flight

For as long as I can remember, Mom has been hounding Dad about getting a bird feeder for the garden. Not just any bird feeder, mind you. Not one of those makeshift Coke bottle contraptions strung up with a bit of fishing line (although there is room for one of them too) but something worthy of the bird kingdom, a proper feeder with multiple stations, each catering to the very particular tastes of the feathered residents in our area.

Living so close to the Vaal River, I'd say birding here is actually pretty good. We're in a suburb aptly named Three Rivers, because, well, that's exactly what it is. The Suikerbos, Klip, and Vaal Rivers all meet within a couple of kilometres of our home, and if you step outside early enough, you can hear the whistling ducks calling overhead as they head out for breakfast. During the day, there's often the haunting cry of a fish eagle echoing across the water, and in summer, the air is filled with the cheerful chatter of European bee-eaters flitting between the tall trees across the road.

Now, we never expected to lure these headline acts to our garden, they're more the rock stars of the riverbanks, but we figured their smaller cousins might just be tempted in if we rolled out the right kind of welcome mat. Mom kept making her case. Dad kept nodding. And then carrying on with other projects.

Eventually, on Mom's birthday, she unwrapped a bird feeder. Finally! She was thrilled... until she took a closer look. It was nice enough, but it still didn't have *that* something she'd been dreaming about.

So out came the sketch pad. Now, Mom's drawing skills aren't exactly gallery material, but she sat down and carefully illustrated what she had in mind. I think she even labelled the parts, just in case Dad thought her blob shapes were something entirely different. Something must have clicked, because the very next day the lightbulb moment happened. Dad finally *got* it.

What followed was a flurry of DIY energy. Contraptions made, perches added (she still wants a couple more), and the feeder began to take shape. And just like that, like a final ribbon on a birthday gift, the new feeder was installed, a genuine, multi-course bird buffet.

And what a buffet it is. The birds in our garden now eat better than we do. They have fresh fruit, a rotating mix to keep things interesting. They have seeds, carefully chosen for variety. There are mealworms, dried bread, and extra peanut butter filled suet balls. There is even a never ending supply of sweet nectar for the sugar lovers. It's like a five-star lodge menu out there.

With trees for cover, multiple water features for a drink or a splash bath, and unlimited snack refills, the birds don't just visit, they linger. The regulars have their favourite perches. The shy ones hop around the edges. And every now and again, a surprise guest drops in, sending us scrambling for the binoculars and camera, both of which now have a permanent home by the back door. It must also be mentioned that the garden is full of succulents that attracts sunbirds too.

One morning, I mentioned to Mom that I'd seen posts online about people in Natal who had birds eating avocados from their gardens. You'd think I'd just announced a rare bird sighting in our kitchen. Her eyes lit up, she turned to Dad, and the next thing I knew, there was talk of planting an avo tree. Poor Dad. His garden to-do list is about to get even longer.

It's not just the birds that have taken to the feeder, either. The bees adore the nectar. They hum happily between the feeder and the flowering succulents, and honestly, it's hard not to feel a little smug about it. After all, bees are one of the most important parts of our environment, and if we can give them a boost while spoiling the birds, that's a win-win.

In a way, the feeder has done more than just bring wildlife to our garden. It's brought our family together in small but meaningful ways. We'll sit outside on weekend mornings with coffee, watching the weavers squabble over the best seed tray. Mom keeps a mental note of who's visiting and when. Dad tweaks the setup whenever inspiration strikes, or when Mom brings him another "small suggestion", and now there's talk of more changes to come soon.

And me? I've realised that sometimes the best entertainment isn't on a screen, it's right outside, fluttering on a branch or dipping a beak into nectar.

So yes, it took some years of gentle (and not-so-gentle) persuasion, one slightly dubious drawing, and a sudden burst of DIY enthusiasm, but we've finally got the bird feeder Mom always wanted. And judging by the feathered traffic it attracts, it's safe to say word has spread in the local bird community, this garden is the place to be.