



Grassland Tails

Acrylic on canvas, 24"x18", 2016

The *Xerophyta retinervis* (Baboon-tail) is a wonderfully showy plant and flowers every alternate year in this dry climate. It has a fibrous "stem" which grows taller each year, moving the growing part farther away from the ground. It is a little like an orchid not needing to draw nutrients from the soil, hence its name Xerophyta (Greek: dry plant). The stem has fire-retardant properties which enable it to survive the prevalent veld fires. Early white settlers dipped these stems into fat and used them as torches. I included a Spotted Thick-knee which was taken and raised by a young girl in our area after its mother had been eaten by a genet (a small catlike creature). It was a challenge for her family to catch enough insects for the insectivorous young bird. It was such a loving little creature snuggling close and running wildly in circles, they called it "Dizzy." One morning the family were devastated to discover that it too had been eaten by a genet. I hid an African Red Toad in the picture as they are one of the more common species in the area; sadly, worldwide, many frogs and toads are threatened with extinction.

Here is a poem I wrote about this painting:

*There are many tales about the veld some of which we should heed.
 Ask the Baboon-tail what it has endured since it first grew from seed.
 It can describe the raging veld-fires it has had to bare
 And of the beasts passing by who are no longer there.
 It can tell of the Ice Age and the birth of early ape-man
 But to survive Global Warming it will need a better plan.
 Then there is the tale of an orphaned Thick-knee named Dizzy
 The catching of insect meals kept young Erin, and mum, very busy
 The bird with its antics and snuggling brought great joy and delight
 Sadly Dizzy, being nocturnal, made a meal for a genet one night.
 So scary are the tales told by frogs like this African Red Toad
 Of how amphibians the world over will soon croak their last ode.
 Will humans who live in a Virtual World ever care or take heed?
 Before our world goes extinct and nothing remains from their greed.*



Cabbage Tree Emperor

Gouache, 10"x14", 2016

In the summer months, *Cussonia paniculata* (Highveld Cabbage Tree) leaves are reduced to bare stalks by the very large and strikingly marked black larvae of an emperor moth. *Bunaea alcinoe* or Cabbage Tree Emperor is an attractive moth of the Saturniidae family and can attain a wingspan of nearly seven inches. These moths have large orange hind-wing spots which they flash when threatened. I have long wanted to paint this stunning creature and had both a pupa case and a few large dead adult moths in my fridge. One morning, when opening the back door, I discovered a large male moth with his feathery antennae clinging to the wooden surface. I quickly photographed him in this unusual position, and on turning to go to my studio, I caught sight of a Southern Boubou Shrike making off with this male in its beak. It was battling to fly with such a large flapping creature, but nevertheless, lugged it away and turned it into a breakfast fit for a king.



Wild Dog Pup III

Acrylic on Masonite board, 15" x 14.5", 2011

I love the rare, threatened Painted Wolves of Africa. "Devil dogs," or the name by which they are best known, Wild Dogs, require large territories and have been persecuted in southern Africa over the past hundred years such that numbers have dwindled to almost unsustainable populations. A couple of breeding centers in southern Africa help sustain a variable gene pool. A Cheetah and Wild Dog breeding sanctuary (both threatened species in Africa) is located not too far from where I live. I have obtained some art reference material from the animals there, but because the sanctuary staff want to return as many to the wild as possible, depending on space, human access is very limited, especially to the pups. I have been fortunate to have had wonderful encounters with these most special creatures in wild game areas and reserves which have provided super reference material for my paintings, portraits and drawings through the years.