



September 26th 2012, cloudy 26°

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On September 7 our son Mark married his Anne. What was to take place in the far future was moved forward. It recently became known that Anne's father is incurably ill and has not long to live. Of course, Mark and Anne always assumed that he would attend their wedding. It was a wonderful wedding, celebrated in a very close circle.

And on September 20 there son was born: Teun. I am a granny!



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1. TIME IS EVERYTHING

O tempo é tudo. Time is everything, as the slogan of the Alentejo Tourist Board runs. It might just as well be the slogan for Monte do Casarão. Add the (generally) available sun, the silence, the wonderful smell (a combination of cistus, eucalyptus and mint), the fact that there's nobody around, except your fellow-travellers, the delightful feeling that you don't have to do anything and it feels as if you've entered another dimension.



The high season is about over now. We loved our guests, and they loved it here. We would refer you to our guestbook, but most reactions are in Dutch. We can tell you however, what they all write: 'It is so much lovelier than the website led us to expect'; 'It is *really* quiet here' and 'After only one day the cottage feels like our own home'. Time may be everything, but most guests feel that the time they spend here is far too short. Such was the case with three-year-old Thijs, who on the day of departure told his parents: 'You can go home, I'll just stay here.'

2. THE SNAKE MAN

We have rather a few guests from the medical world. Nurses, doctors, therapists... However, never before had we accommodated someone who operates on reptiles.

The snake man, as we jokingly called him, has been catching reptiles in inland Africa and Central America for the greater part of his life. He designs reptile housing and vivariums, gives lectures and is called in by the police when yet another snake has escaped. Moreover, he is a walking encyclopedia and a natural storyteller, so you will understand that we hung on his every word. The Red-tailed Spiny-footed Lizard, the Iberian emerald lizard, the Mediterranean House Gecko, the Large Psammodromus, the common midwife toad... we now know what walks/ crawls around in these parts. We actually witnessed a sample of his medical capabilities. A natrix natrix astreptophora (a harmless grass snake) was devouring a toad. The effort wasn't very successful, as the toad was far too large. 'It will let the creature go', the



snake man said. 'It will soon realize the toad is far too big'. And sure enough, a few moments later, the toad was free. It had been hurt, though; a few intestines were protruding. The snake man started looking for a strong straw, grabbed hold of the toad and in an experienced manner he pushed the intestines back in. 'There. It will live.'

3. A BOX FULL OF OWL

A creature that unfortunately did not fare so well, was our owl. Our eagle owl, *bubo bubo, buforeal*. The largest owl species in Europe, recognizable by its tufty ears and its orange eyes. Height 70 centimetres, wingspan 1,70 m. We found it nearby, badly hurt after a one-sided fight with barbed wire. Through the animal police and the national environmental organisation Quercus, it eventually ended up in the *Centro de Recuperação de Animais Selvagens* in Lisbon, where it was operated upon. Everybody had braced themselves for the outcome, but still we felt awful about it: the eagle owl didn't survive all our good intentions. It died two days after the operation.



4. PAINTING WEEKS AND POOL PARTIES

Just another week now, and there is another painting week about to start. I always look forward to that for months, for my fellow managers always allow me to join in. Every painting week is different. The set-up is the same, but the programme take shape depending on the weather and the participants' desires.

By now, there is a permanent group of participants, and the fun bit is, that a number of them, including the teacher, Jenny Helder, regularly teams up to paint outdoors in the Netherlands as well. In the dunes of Castricum, in the Kromslootpark in Almere, on the heath at Hilversum: every time a location is chosen in the vicinity of one of the participants.

Recently, we had another astonishing week. Our son Bob and his wife Digna came to capitalise their wedding present. Together with their friends they occupied all the cottages for one week. *Let's party!* I have never known so many pool parties!



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