



# IBA NEWSLETTER

*Welcome to BirdLife South Africa's first Important Bird Areas newsletter. We will send out two a year filled with stories, updates and everything else you need to know about conserving the most important sites in South Africa for our birds.*

## THE IBA PROGRAMME

**T**he Important Bird Areas (IBA) Programme is one of BirdLife South Africa's most important conservation initiatives. It speaks to all four focal areas of BirdLife South Africa: species, sites, habitats and people.

After being reinvigorated at the end of 2009, the IBA Programme has grown from strength to strength. In 2012 it will grow to eight staff members, comprising a national coordinator, four regional conservation managers, an IBA data manager, and three education and community development staff. The IBA Steering Committee continues to offer valuable guidance and decision-making support to Daniel Marnewick, the national coordinator.

**We are confident that the IBA Programme will soon be at the forefront of conservation in South Africa once again, becoming the guardian of our birds' most important habitats.**

I have to thank BirdLife South Africa's members, clubs, regional forums, our NGO and government partners

and especially the IBA staff; they all believe in the IBA Programme, have supported our work and given of their time and expertise to make it successful.

**DANIEL MARNEWICK**  
IBA PROGRAMME MANAGER



*IBA team (from left): Ernst Retief, Nicholas Theron, Daniel Marnewick, Charmaine Uys, Joe Peu, Kristi Garland, André Steenkamp and Dale Wright (inset).*

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Diderick Cuckoo  
CHRIS VAN ROOYEN

## CURRENT STATE OF SOUTH AFRICA'S IBAS

**H**istorically, a global trend was to delineate protected areas based on political boundaries and agendas. This resulted in serious gaps in global protected area networks, no more so than in South Africa. At the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Conference of the Parties meeting in Japan (2010), BirdLife International used the global IBA network map to show politicians what a first cut of important biodiversity areas should look like, and where the gaps were in the protected area networks.

Back in 1998, *The Important Bird Areas of Southern Africa* directory (Barnes) was a leader in its time, showing us the critical areas for bird conservation. The IBA network has, however, remained static since then. Today, advances in conservation planning and GIS have surpassed what this directory has to offer. **BirdLife South Africa has made it our mission not only to align our IBAs with these advances, but to become a frontrunner when it comes to planning for biodiversity conservation.** This is not to say that the IBAs identified in 1998 are not still important, but rather that the justification and conservation planning for those sites need to be more scientifically sound. So we need to re-evaluate the status of existing IBAs. We have

begun doing so using up-to-date avian, biodiversity conservation planning and spatial planning data. The end product will be dynamic, scientifically defensible, data driven, and ultimately mainstreamed into provincial and national biodiversity plans. We are very excited about this undertaking!

**At present, South Africa has 124 IBAs, covering over 14 million hectares of habitat for our threatened, endemic and congregatory birds.** Yet only 41% of the total land surface covered by our IBAs is legally protected. The BirdLife South Africa IBA Programme continues working to conserve IBAs through environmental education, advocacy, assessments, monitoring, establishing site support



groups (SSGs) and ultimately through proclamation as a protected area using biodiversity stewardship.

Sadly, many of the key threats identified in the 1998 IBA directory have intensified. Habitat loss and degradation due to mining, urban expansion and inappropriate agricultural practices continue to jeopardise our most critical sites for biodiversity. New threats have emerged, such as wind farms and fracking. Climate change and habitat loss remain two of the biggest threats to our birds.

BirdLife South Africa registers on a regular basis as an Interested & Affected Party for inappropriate mining applications and developments that might affect birds in our priority IBAs. But we are only a small team, working across a large country. So Ernst Retief has published a short guide to access avian data for EIA reports to assist EIA practitioners. This guideline can be downloaded from our website: <http://www.birdlife.org.za/conservation/iba/documentation-downloads>

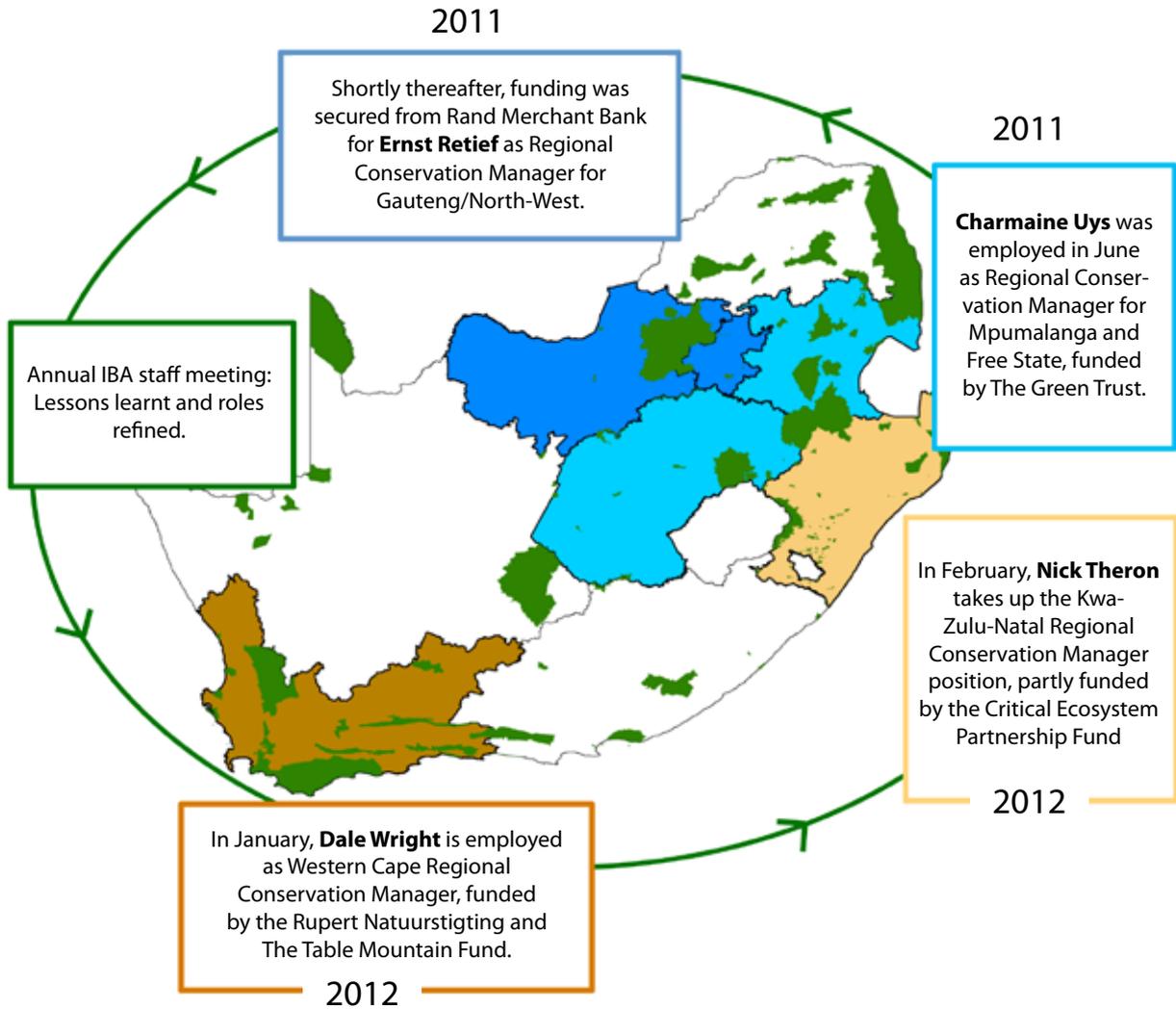
This year, IBA monitoring assessments have been completed for Collywobbles, Suikerbosrand and Magaliesberg, and started for Nylsvley, Steenkampsberg and Memel. With almost 120 IBAs awaiting assessment, we have a big task ahead of us! Therefore, we have established three Regional IBA Conservation Working Groups in Gauteng/North West, the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal to assist BLSA with IBA assessments and avian monitoring. We plan to establish similar regional forums in Mpumalanga and the Free State. In 2012 we hope to have assessed at least 90% of the IBAs where we have regional managers. This will provide us with data to compile an IBA Trend & Status Report using indicators such as 'status', 'threat' and 'response' to tell us whether we are succeeding in conserving our birds' habitats.

**DANIEL MARNEWICK**  
IBA PROGRAMME MANAGER

*Left Many of the key threats identified in the 1998 IBA directory have since intensified and new ones have emerged, such as wind farms.*

# REGIONAL CONSERVATION MANAGERS

This year, the IBA Programme strategically spread its wings, creating a new level of positions for Regional Conservation Managers. A 'bite-sized chunks' approach was adopted, to coordinate nationally, work regionally and act locally.



Spotted Eagle-Owl  
CHRIS VAN ROOYEN

**Regional Conservation Managers** fulfil many roles and responsibilities. They build strong organisational relations with regional role-players, especially provincial conservation agencies and NGOs. Working within the national context, they will identify the 'ABCs' of IBAs in their regions, namely areas that are Important Bird Areas, Buffer zones and Corridors. The next steps are developing conservation plans for priority IBAs and species, and devising habitat management guidelines. They must ensure that IBA and avian data are incorporated into provincial biodiversity and spatial management plans. Perhaps one of their most valuable contributions to conservation is providing a 'warm body on the ground' to support the Biodiversity Stewardship programme at priority IBAs. They assist the Policy and Advocacy Division by commenting on EIA applications, attending public participation meetings, etc. An often rewarding aspect of their work includes promoting avitourism and building capacity through environmental education.

**DANIEL MARNEWICK**  
IBA PROGRAMME MANAGER



# OUR GRASSLANDS

**A**t first glance, grasslands often seem drab and covered in, well, grass! Even the small birds all look a hundred different shades of brown. Yet the larger grassland birds are some of the most beautiful and charismatic species South Africa has to offer. These include Wattled, Blue and Grey Crowned cranes, Secretarybird, Stanley's Bustard, African Grass-Owl and Southern Bald Ibis.

**Of South Africa's 841 bird species, 350 occur in the Grassland Biome.** More pertinently, 29 are of conservation concern and 10 species are endemic to South Africa. This is why the grasslands hold some of our most Important Bird Areas (IBAs).

Only 2.8% of the Grassland Biome is formally protected, mostly in the

Drakensberg. It is frightening that 65% of grassland habitat is already transformed. Grasslands are heavily exploited for urban and agricultural development, forestry and mining. Livestock over-grazing and unnatural fire regimes also pose serious threats, especially to the grassland-specialist bird species. **Clearly the Grassland Biome is one of our most threatened biomes and most in need of urgent conservation action.**

In 2010, BirdLife South Africa made a strategic decision to focus terrestrial conservation efforts on the Grassland Biome, and in 2011 we launched the Grasslands Programme. The vision is to protect and conserve the endemic and threatened bird species that occur in grasslands. This year, we

chose to focus our efforts on three priority grassland IBAs: Steenkampberg in the Belfast–Dullstroom area, Chrissie Pans in the Mpumalanga Lakes District, and Memel within the Grasslands Biosphere in the Free State. Other like-minded conservation organisations have similarly identified the grasslands as a centre in need of conservation.

We are racing against time, because nearly every week there is a new application to develop or mine the grasslands. With funding from the Green Trust (WWF-SA/Nedbank), BirdLife South Africa's dedicated Grasslands Programme is working tirelessly with government departments, other NGOs, landowners and local communities to get critical sites protected. This can be achieved by signing privately owned land into Biodiversity Stewardship agreements to formally declare Protected Areas and improve the habitat management of farmlands for bird conservation.

**CHARMAINE UYS**  
**GRASSLANDS PROGRAMME MANAGER**

*Left Charmaine Uys conducting a site assessment of Seekoivlei Nature Reserve, Memel.*

*Above During 2011 the Secretarybird was uplisted to Vulnerable on the IUCN Red Data List.*



# ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION



Left *Linking environmental education to learning other skills.*

Below *Using practical observation in the field – testing water quality in a wetland.*



**B**irdLife South Africa's focal area of 'working with people' is a common thread that needs to run through the other three focal areas, none more so than at Important Bird Areas (IBA). It is our ambition that every South African supports our IBAs, and for that we need to ensure that everybody sees the value of our IBAs. **Education therefore plays a critical role in sensitising people, especially local youth, to IBAs.** More importantly, young people who live closest to IBAs will be the future custodians of those areas. We therefore need to educate the youth of today for sustainable IBAs tomorrow.

BirdLife South Africa's Environmental Education Programme, headed up by Joe Peu and supported by Kristi Garland and André Steenkamp, is targeting communities living around IBAs. The education material this programme uses will be revamped in 2012, which will result in an education tool that can be used by schools, learners and bird clubs.

## LEARNING FOR SUSTAINABLE LIVING PROGRAMME

BirdLife South Africa has been promoting environmental education through its 'Learning for Sustainable Living' (LfSL) programme, which

focuses on the sustainable use of the environment, specifically with regard to birds. Environmental education is seen by educators as an essential and relevant topic. However, the national education curriculum does not provide support material. To help fill this gap, the LfSL programme is designed to equip learners with the tools to make informed decisions about environmental issues.

The aim of the LfSL programme is to provide learners with the skills and information to make the right choices. Chief among these is to promote active learning both within and outside the classroom, link lessons and activities to action ('action competence'), demonstrate the incorporation of the environment in all learning areas, and involve the community and all stakeholders. This provides a means of building the community's knowledge of environmental issues, challenges and opportunities around them that affect their daily lives.

A number of activities are planned to achieve these goals. These include learning activities with scholars, workshops for teachers, rehabilitation of the Wakkerstroom wetland and the catchment area, and celebrating important national environmental days, e.g. World Wetlands Day and Arbor Day.

BirdLife South Africa's Education Programme is looking for a sponsor to help revise and print the LfSL material. If you can help, please contact Joe Peu on [education@birdlife.org.za](mailto:education@birdlife.org.za) or tel. 011 789 1122.

**JOE PEU**  
EDUCATION PROGRAMME MANAGER

## THE WAKKERSTROOM CENTRE

Through funding from the Vodacom Foundation, 800 learners have participated in hands-on environmental excursions in our local grasslands and wetlands. Learning material has been developed that will support educators in their curriculum >>>

*BirdLife South Africa has been promoting environmental education through its 'Learning for Sustainable Living' (LfSL) programme, which focuses on the sustainable use of the environment, specifically with regard to birds*



*Above Hamhani Primary surveying the grassland.*

*Below Perdekop Agricultural School in the midst of a water study.*

teaching, create awareness among learners about the environment and ultimately contribute towards the conservation of the Wakkerstroom wetlands and surrounding grasslands. In the first quarter of 2012 another 800 learners will pass through the gates of the BirdLife South Africa Wakkerstroom Centre.

The one-day programme starts with an introduction to BirdLife South Africa and what we do as a conservation organisation. The trainers also mention that the day's programme, lunch and transport subsidy are all made possible through funding from the Vodacom Foundation. The learners are introduced to the concept of ecology, how it works and the interconnectivity of abiotic and biotic elements, through the 'Can Game'. Through playing this game, the learners gain a basic understanding of ecology.

With these basics in mind, the group heads off to discover the birds inhabiting the Wakkerstroom wetlands and grasslands. **The learners are shown how to use binoculars,**

which for many is the first time they have ever seen a pair. They also look at how each bird is adapted to its specific micro-environment, e.g. an African Snipe has a long beak that allows it to search for and gather food from the shallows, while a Blackbellied Bustard has long legs for easy movement through the grassland.

The group then moves onto a water study. By looking at the water insects found in a sample of water, one is able to determine whether the water is clean or polluted.

After lunch, the group gathers for consolidation – a time to tie everything they have learnt together and make decisions on how to proceed in life, knowing what they have learnt on the excursion. A follow-up classroom visit to each school is conducted by the BirdLife South Africa Education trainers to refresh ideas and for the learners to present their projects.

We would like to thank the Vodacom Foundation for its support as well as the attending schools for their participation and enthusiasm. For further information, please contact Kristi Garland at [wakkerstroom-centre@birdlife.org.za](mailto:wakkerstroom-centre@birdlife.org.za)

**KRISTI GARLAND, OPERATIONS MANAGER,  
WAKKERSTROOM CENTRE**



*A follow-up classroom visit to each school is conducted by the BLSA Education trainers to refresh ideas and for the learners to present their projects*

## MARINE IBA PROGRAMME

The Important Bird Areas (IBA) Programme endeavours to identify critical habitats by using the IBA monitoring and assessment frameworks to drive formal (and informal) protection for key sites.

However, although identifying terrestrial IBAs is relatively easy, the situation is quite different in the case of seabirds. This is largely due to the lack of good, usable, at-sea distribution information, and also the complicating factor of the dynamic nature of marine ecosystems. It is difficult to protect birds at sea if they are constantly on the move, as one needs to track ephemeral or only semi-predictable features such as oceanic fronts.

Nonetheless, for many species, seaward extensions from breeding islands should afford a measure of protection if those marine IBAs are declared Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). This is the first phase in BirdLife South Africa's marine IBA Programme and is being spearheaded by Tim Reid, a post-doctoral fellow at UCT's Percy FitzPatrick Institute.

Marine IBAs will for example possibly be declared around African Penguin breeding site colonies, with a buffer of about 20 km being proposed.

Our vision for the marine IBA programme is to amalgamate information from multiple sources that demonstrate where seabirds consistently go to find food. We hope to use these 'layers' to help inform national MPA expansion planning processes.

**DR ROSS WANLESS**  
**MANAGER: SEABIRD DIVISION**  
[gsp@birdlife.org.za](mailto:gsp@birdlife.org.za)



*African Penguin*

PETER RYAN

# COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

## Cata Ecotourism Development Initiative

**S**taying with people, working with the communities who live in and around IBAs is vitally important to conserve that IBA successfully. Not only do innovative projects develop positive links between social development and the conservation of a site, but these communities become important custodians for their IBA.

The village of Cata is nestled at the base of the Amatola Mountains in the Eastern Cape. The Amatolas are designated as an IBA and the focus of the Cata Project has been to capacitate the community to manage a tourism income-generating product. **If the livelihoods of local communities can be improved through ecotourism, incentives are created whereby the community contributes to the conservation of their natural surroundings.** BirdLife South Africa's involvement in the village has the ultimate aim of contributing to the conservation of this IBA, specifically the Endangered Cape Parrot that occurs here.

Much of Cata's allure is in its friendly people with their open natures. The community is small, extremely safe and offers a unique experience into



the daily rhythms of a rural Xhosa community in the 21st century. Distinctive to the community is the number of young people who are actively involved in projects run throughout the village and have decided to stay instead of making the usual trek to larger urban centres throughout South Africa. Of these youngsters, six are trained guides and can take visitors on a number of tours.

For a cultural experience, heritage trails are on offer. Or if you would like

to experience the rare biodiversity of the area opt for a trail, developed by BirdLife South Africa, through the surrounding grasslands and forests. Part of the magic of such a trail is the experience of spending time with one of the local guides who share their indigenous knowledge and passion for their community. Other activities include horse-trails and fly-fishing.

Accommodation options are in the form of homestays, where you can live with a local family, or otherwise try out the newly built self-catering chalets that overlook the village.

For an honest experience of a modern Xhosa village, consider a trip to this picturesque village on your next holiday. The Cata Ecotourism Development Initiative is sponsored by the European Union's Sustainable Rural Development in the Eastern Cape (SURUDEK) programme. For more information on Cata, please visit [www.cata.org.za](http://www.cata.org.za)

**NICHOLAS THERON**

**CATA COMMUNITY PROJECT MANAGER**

*Left Project steering committee members with a homestay family in Cata.*

*Above View from the Cata community towards the Amatola mountains and forests, home of the Endangered Cape Parrot.*



# NEW IBA WEBSITE A LOOK INTO THE FUTURE

In terms of technology, numerous developments have taken place since the publication of *The Important Bird Areas of Southern Africa* by Barnes in 1998. In particular, it was the phenomenon of the Internet that took the world by storm and quickly became a major form of communication for individuals and especially organisations like BirdLife South Africa.

The IBA Programme decided to embrace the Internet and use it extensively to publicise the work we are doing. We have taken the first steps in this process by creating a number of IBA web pages. We added the 'contact details of the IBA staff' and 'a list of all our valuable sponsors'. We also updated the 'instructions on how to get involved', 'latest news items' and 'how to do an IBA assessment', and a range of documentation can be downloaded from the website.

Visit <http://www.birdlife.org.za/conservation/iba>

We are also aiming to create a web page for each of the 124 Important Bird Areas in the country. Each page will contain the following:

- The name, numbers and extent in hectares of the IBA
- A Google Earth map of the IBA
- General text, similar to that which appeared in the IBA directory. The current text will be updated to reflect changes in, for example, bird and place names.
- Photographs of the IBA



- Key bird species lists
- List of threats to the IBA
- Relevant documents that can be downloaded

These pages will not be static: the aim is to update them as assessments are done and key bird species and threats are recorded for an IBA. It is our hope that if this is done on a regular basis, we will have a revised online IBA directory in a year or two.

The screen shot above shows an example of what the introductory part of each individual page will look like. We hope to have the first few pages ready by the end of February 2012 and new pages will be added on a continuous basis. Watch this space for more updates and information!

**ERNST RETIEF**  
**IBA DATA MANAGER**

## HOW CAN YOU HELP?

\*SMS 'iba' to 38878

The vision for our Important Bird Areas Programme is that it will ultimately steer BirdLife South Africa's terrestrial conservation intervention work at a site level.

To do so, we need your support. You can assist BirdLife South Africa's IBA Programme by SMSing 'iba' to 38878.

You can also make a donation directly into our bank account, using the reference "IBA", account details BirdLife South Africa, First National Bank, Randburg 254-005, Account No. 62067506281.

For more information, please contact Daniel Marnewick:  
Cell 082 772 4432

E-mail [iba@birdlife.org.za](mailto:iba@birdlife.org.za)

\*R10 per SMS. Free SMS and SMS bundles do not apply. All proceeds, less service provider fees, will be donated to BirdLife South Africa. Error messages will be billed. More details on BirdLife South Africa website.

## A BIG THANK YOU

BirdLife South Africa's Important Bird Areas Programme, Regional Conservation and work with people are all supported by many generous donors, including:

**IBA PROGRAMME: HONDA**

**REGIONAL CONSERVATION MANAGERS:**



**EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY CONSERVATION:**



Vodacom Foundation



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