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# IBA NEWSLETTER

*Welcome to BirdLife South Africa's Winter 2014 Important Bird & Biodiversity Areas newsletter. We send out two issues 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.*

## EDITORIAL

**W**ith some 846 bird species, eight biomes, and high numbers of endemic species, South Africa has one of the most important conservation mandates. South Africa's high developmental demands, mineral wealth, and the lack of sufficient resources for government and NGOs to conserve habitats and biodiversity makes this mandate a challenge.

Nonetheless, the success of conservation has never been as critical as at present, and the conservation industry and civil society have recognised that not only is this possibly the 'last stand',

but that we need to stand together. With a protected area network that covers only ca. 6% of South Africa, much of our biodiversity richness and importance falls within unprotected private lands. The buy-in of these private land-owners is, therefore, not necessary, but critical. BirdLife South Africa's Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas Programme (IBA Programme) has been working tirelessly to develop the means to effectively engage this sector to ensure that we face this challenge arm-in-arm. Examples of successful collaborative efforts are highlighted in our articles on landowner and corporate custodianship. Our small IBA team of

*Landowners, government conservation departments and NGOs have been coming together under the banner of Biodiversity Stewardship to protect critically important parcels of biodiversity rich lands, in Memel, Free State.*



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seven cannot achieve the conservation of important habitats for birds and biodiversity (i.e. IBAs) alone. It has been through the support of individual champions that our impact at site level has increased tenfold. It has also been through the support of these individuals that the team has managed to assess nearly 80% of the IBA network. A synopsis of the results of these assessments is provided in this newsletter on page five. We hope this will wet your appetite for our first IBA Status Report which will be published in early 2015.

If we can continue to engage all sectors, from individuals to large corporations, to stand together in protecting our natural heritage then we can rise to the challenge set before us.

**DANIEL MARNEWICK**

**Manager: Important Bird & Biodiversity Areas and Regional Conservation Programme, BirdLife South Africa,**  
[iba@birdlife.org.za](mailto:iba@birdlife.org.za)

# PRIVATE LANDOWNERS CAN SAVE THE DAY THROUGH BIODIVERSITY STEWARDSHIP

**O**n a global scale, assessments of Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs) show that formally protected IBAs are in a better state than unprotected IBAs. This trend is proving true across the IBAs assessed in South Africa thus far. Developing countries have limited resources to invest in the expansion of protected areas and only 40% of South Africa's 122 IBAs are legally protected.

South Africa is committed to expand its protected areas network to 12% of South Africa's surface area. This is essential if we are to ensure the most important and representative habitats and species are protected. In 2008, protected areas amounted to only 6.5% of our surface area this effectively needs to be doubled in the next 20 years. However, the limited resources allocated to conservation make this an ambitious target.

*Biodiversity Stewardship also allows organisations such as BirdLife South Africa to lobby for the inclusion of priority IBAs in the expansion of the protected areas network*

South Africa is rich in many respects, none more so than its heritage which is largely embedded in its natural landscape and culture. Over decades, people have had strong connections to land which has passed from one generation to the next, creating strong social links to the land and its natural features. This land was made to be productive, whether for agriculture, tourism or game farming, and in many cases these practices can be compatible with conservation objectives. Our South African context lends itself to expanding its protected area network in partnership with private land owners.



This partnership is often best expressed in the Biodiversity Stewardship initiative which provides an alternative, cost effective conservation tool for securing biodiversity; promoting the sustainable management of natural resources; and expanding the protected area network outside of state-owned national parks and nature reserves. This is done primarily through voluntary legal agreements with landowners. Biodiversity Stewardship also allows organisations such as BirdLife South Africa to lobby for the inclusion of priority IBAs in the expansion of the protected areas network. So, in collaboration with provincial conservation departments and partner environmental organisations, BirdLife South Africa has been engaging landowners towards declaring over 100 000 ha of Protected Environments in priority IBAs including grasslands, wetlands and estuaries. The first of these sites, the Mpumalanga Lakes District (Chrissie Pans IBA), was declared a Protected Environment in January 2014 and serves as a flagship success.

While formal protection has shown improved management of sites, Biodiversity Stewardship is a relatively new model which over the next few

*Landowners who farm within IBAs have the opportunity to make a real contribution to conserving these habitats through becoming IBA Custodians.*

years will stand the test of improving biodiversity conservation. Nonetheless, these Biodiversity Stewardship declarations can potentially contribute towards conserving our most important habitats, whilst maintaining livelihoods from livestock farming, agriculture and tourism, thus, ensuring food and water security.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to use Biodiversity Stewardship to achieve formal protection for all IBAs. To fill this gap, and at the very least achieve improved management of the habitat, BirdLife South Africa has initiated an IBA Custodianship project. This project, under an informal agreement, encourages land owners to properly manage and care for the birds, habitats and other biodiversity found on their property. This project is being piloted in the Devon area of the Gauteng Province.

**DANIEL MARNEWICK, National IBA Programme Manager, [iba@birdlife.org.za](mailto:iba@birdlife.org.za)**  
**ERNST RETIEF, Regional Conservation Manager, Gauteng, Mpumalanga and Free State [ernst.retief@birdlife.org.za](mailto:ernst.retief@birdlife.org.za)**

# INDIVIDUALS CHAMPIONING OUR CAUSE

As our global society grows ever larger, one can experience a sense of growing anonymity. We become just an ID number or a bank account, often losing the sense of our individuality in the global village. When one also considers the many environmental injustices and the huge task facing conservationists in addressing these, one can become despondent, standing like David facing the Goliath of big oil companies or large, profit-driven organisations.

However, as the Dalai Lama once said: "If you think you are too small to make a difference, try sleeping with a mosquito in the room." Indeed, in recent years the voice of civil society has grown ever stronger. Through advocacy and lobby groups; legally required public participation processes; and the advent of social media, the individual is granted a voice in the decision making processes which ultimately shape the world we live in. The buzzing voice of the environmentalist has become a common sound at any public meeting regarding a new development. These voices are often not only emotionally connected to the decisions at hand, but also armed with the scientific facts and knowledge to clearly substantiate their arguments. These voices do not advocate the end of development, but rather argue for the alternatives that pose less threat to the environment, or enhance the socio-economic sustainability of an area.

The role an individual can play in conservation extends beyond advocacy work; as is evident in the many volunteers that assist BirdLife South Africa and our partners in a range of conservation projects. Assistance may take the form of much needed fundraising, environmental education initiatives, or taking part in one of the

many citizen science bird monitoring projects. In all of these avenues, an individual can choose their level of participation or the activity which best suits their skills set, or even a new skill they feel they might have a 'knack' for. The work of BirdLife South Africa and the Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas Programme (IBA Programme) is strengthened and broadened through



*Keith Harrison's work spans six different IBAs and his knowledge of these sites was fundamental in the drafting of their IBA assessments*

such volunteerism; individuals involved allow us to be more impactful and effective in our work creating larger, longer-lasting outcomes for conservation and for our threatened habitats and their birds. This could not be achieved by an organisation alone; the role one passionate person can make is immeasurable.

Many of our readers can probably name a number of people they feel fit the description above; people who give tirelessly of themselves to any number of different projects. We are planning to showcase these individuals in future editions of this newsletter; in particular those whose efforts raise the profile of our Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs) and contribute to their conservation and survival.

One such person is Keith Harrison, of the West Coast Bird Club. Keith represents our birds and essential habitats and their conservation needs on a number of different platforms. Keith is a representative on the West Coast National Park Forum, West Coast District Municipal Coastal Committee, Berg River Estuary Management Forum and the Cape West Coast Biosphere

Reserve to name a few. The West Coast of South Africa, a unique and diverse biodiversity area, has been ear-marked for major development projects. Keith keeps an eye on these, commenting on development applications too numerous to mention, and alerting BirdLife South Africa and the IBA team when our involvement is critical. Keith also takes part in many citizen science monitoring projects in the area, and is often sought after by international scientists and academics needing the inside scoop on crucial sites and species on the West Coast. His work spans six different IBAs and his knowledge of these sites was fundamental in the drafting of their IBA assessments. These assessments detail the state of these vitally important habitats and the biodiversity they sustain. The IBAs Keith has directly benefitted through his involvement include: the Olifants River Estuary (SA 099), Bird Island (SA 100), Verlorenvlei (SA 103), Lower Berg River Wetlands (SA 104), West Coast National Park and Saldanha Bay Islands (SA 105), and Dassen Island (SA 109). Keith is an example of the difference an individual can make in the fragile world around us.

We have previously acknowledged the contribution of Dr Dave Whitelaw at the False Bay Ecology Park IBA, and here we salute Keith Harrison for his unwavering commitment to ensuring sustainable development on the West Coast wherever possible, and helping us to give conservation wings.

**DALE WRIGHT, Regional Conservation Manager: Western Cape, BirdLife South Africa**  
[dale.wright@birdlife.org.za](mailto:dale.wright@birdlife.org.za)

**N**ominate your local IBA champion by contacting the relevant Regional Conservation Manager or the IBA National Manager. Send a short motivation and we will make every effort to showcase their contribution in forthcoming editions of our IBA newsletter.

# CORPORATE CUSTODIANSHIP

## Sappi sponsors conservation in southern KZN

**T**he relationship between corporate organisations and conservation NGOs is a sometimes little understood, yet necessary partnership. Corporate entities and large industries are oftentimes responsible for untold destruction and loss of biodiversity and the earth's natural areas. The negative perception created by this leads to a blame game. A balance between conservation and enterprise needs to be achieved to avoid this.

This balance speaks to two competing needs which, if integrated carefully, are mutually beneficial. Society's need for commodities, almost all of which are obtained from natural resources, compete with the need to conserve natural areas which provide crucial services necessary for our survival. Water, air quality, sustainable food sources, emotional upliftment along with many other factors intrinsic to our well-being, are crucial components of biodiversity. In such cases, corporations that have taken a stand to be responsible in conserving these areas require the collaborative efforts of conservation NGOs who have a vital role to play in helping industry conserve habitats.

One such example is Sappi. Sappi has partnered with BirdLife South Africa through funding important facets of our work achieved by the Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas Programme (IBA Programme) in the grasslands of southern KwaZulu-Natal. Sappi has historically had a large impact in this environmentally significant area. Nonetheless, today many important tracts of natural

habitat, which fall under Sappi management, can still support a range of threatened grassland bird species such as the Blue Swallow, Southern Ground-Hornbill, and Cape Parrot. These iconic species are threatened by a number of human impact factors; arguably the most considerable threat is habitat destruction. It is imperative that we protect the little habitat that is left for the continued survival of such species and other aspects of biodiversity.

The IBA Programme strives to achieve this through the work of its Regional Conservation Managers who task themselves with saving vital habitats by thinking globally, and acting locally. The IBA Programme is working with Sappi on a local level to determine the avian significance of the important tracts of natural habitat that they are responsible for. Such collaboration between corporate custodianship and dedicated conservationists is essential in ensuring mutual and sustainable benefits for all.

Five priority sites have been monitored during the first part of the year by BirdLife South Africa's Regional Conservation Manager in KZN, Nick Theron and Sappi staff. These significant grassland sites will continue to be monitored up until the end of 2014. Based on the results, Nick will provide inputs to help guide Sappi's management of these habitats. These inputs will be geared towards saving habitats for the threatened species found there.

One priority site will also be put forward for Biodiversity Steward-

ship (a Programme that seeks to give formal protection to vitally important areas of high biodiversity value) whereby Nick will take up the cause, in partnership with provincial government, of declaring the site a Nature Reserve through the Protected Areas Act. Securing these sites in the grasslands of southern KZN is essential in order to mitigate the myriad of threats this habitat type faces and to ensure we keep the little we have left for future generations. The Grassland Biome is not only beautiful and biodiversity rich but is especially underrepresented in our network of protected areas. Sappi's involvement in this process is essential and the declaration of one of its properties in KwaZulu-Natal as a Nature Reserve is a fantastic start to saving habitats and sites and ensuring the continued survival of key species.

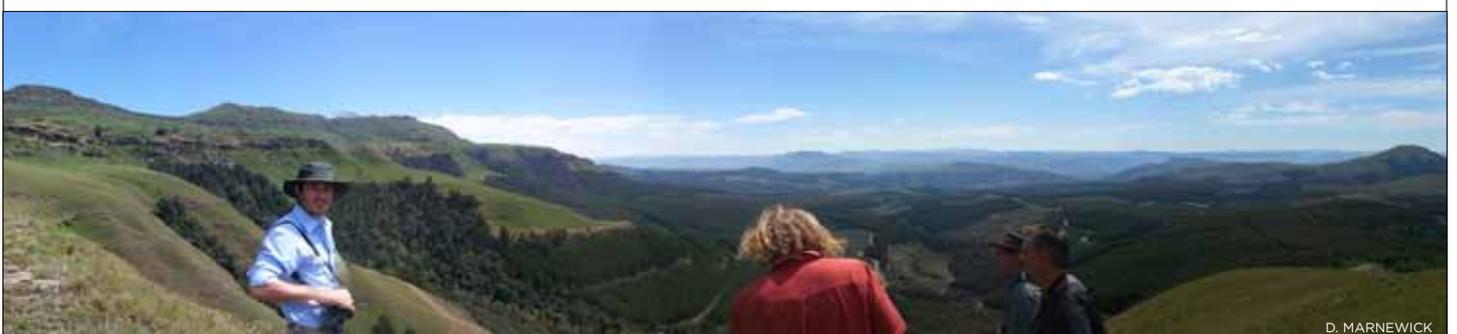
We hope to continue working with responsible corporates such as Sappi who have the potential to make major contributions to the conservation of our country's threatened habitats, and birds. With the myriad of threats facing many of these species and habitats, securing these sites in the grasslands of Southern KZN is essential to the survival of, not only our natural heritage, but also our own.

**NICHOLAS THERON**

**Regional Conservation Manager:**

**KwaZulu-Natal, [nick.theron@birdlife.org.za](mailto:nick.theron@birdlife.org.za)**

*The fragments of mistbelt grasslands situated in between commercial forestry and agriculture in s. KZN needs the support of land owners and companies to ensure their protection.*



D. MARNEWICK

# The State of South Africa's Important Bird & Biodiversity Areas

Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs) are sites of global and regional importance for conserving birds and their habitats. These birds can be threatened, restricted to one biome, have small ranges and/or occur in high congregations at one site. Conserving an IBA is the most effective and necessary means to ensure the survival of these priority species. IBAs are also important for a range of other species and habitats.

South Africa has 122 IBAs, covering 12% of South Africa's land surface (14mil ha), of which less than 40% is formally protected. Since 2010, BirdLife South Africa has been reassessing this network of sites, and has to date assessed over 54% of the IBA network. We aim to complete assessments for all the IBAs by the end of 2014. Two important documents will emanate

from these comprehensive assessments in early 2015, namely the first ever South African IBA Status Report, and a revised IBA Directory.

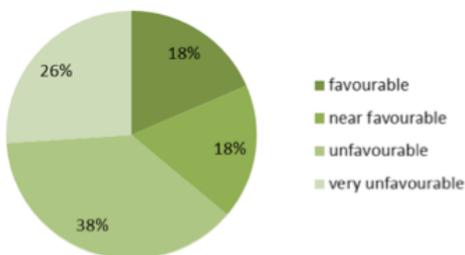
Based on the preliminary results from 66 IBA assessments completed to date, the state of our IBA network is not looking good. The figures below illustrate the high level of threats facing our IBAs and the largely unfavourable habitat conditions for birds. However, there is also a good level of conservation response across 50% of the network thanks to the protected areas network. The 2015 IBA Status Report will provide South Africa with the strategic direction to address threats and focus conservation efforts at IBAs.

BirdLife South Africa's Regional Conservation Managers have dedicated 2014 to completing the remaining IBA assessments, but they rely on local

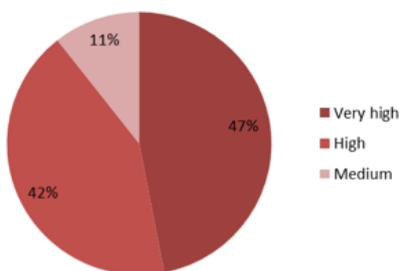
knowledge and bird count and survey data to ensure these assessments are thorough. So, whether you are an avid atlaser, or you have knowledge about a particular IBA, you can make a contribution to the IBA Programme. Please contact the managers in your province if you can provide assistance.

- Western Cape Dale Wright  
[dale.wright@birdlife.org.za](mailto:dale.wright@birdlife.org.za)
- Northern Cape Tania Anderson  
[spothil@gmail.com](mailto:spothil@gmail.com)
- KwaZulu-Natal Nick Theron  
[nick.theron@birdlife.org.za](mailto:nick.theron@birdlife.org.za)
- Limpopo, Gauteng & North West Ernst Retief  
[ernst.retief@birdlife.org.za](mailto:ernst.retief@birdlife.org.za)
- Mpumalanga & Free Stat Daniel Marnewick  
[daniel.marnewick@birdlife.org.za](mailto:daniel.marnewick@birdlife.org.za)
- Eastern Cape Dale Wright or Nick Theron (details above)
- General queries Daniel Marnewick (011) 789 1122

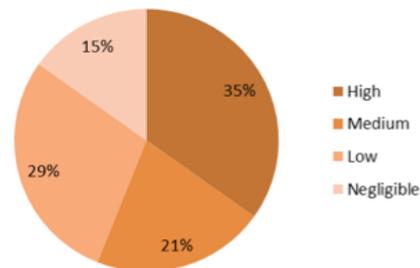
State of Habitats



Threats Status



Conservation Response



## TAKE ACTION ON GIVENGAIN

Members of BirdLife South Africa often ask us how they can assist with our work. There are many ways, including helping us raise funds for our important conservation projects. **Givengain** provides a safe and secure platform for you to raise funds for

causes in which you believe. We have created a page that is dedicated to fundraising for BirdLife South Africa. Click on <http://birdlifesouthafrica.givengain.org> and become an 'Activist' by following the easy steps. By becoming an 'Activist' you can help us 'give conservation wings!'

## A BIG THANK YOU

BirdLife South Africa's IBA work is supported by many generous donors, including:

