



MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate use

Securing natural resources in the face of unsustainable development

Johannesburg, 22 May 2012. The increase in mining applications in certain parts of the country may be good news for certain sectors of the South African economy. More mines could mean economic growth, but other sectors, especially agriculture, tourism and biodiversity, are facing the prospect of losing important natural resources. BirdLife South Africa recognises the link between extractive industries and economic growth and favours sustainable development, but is becoming increasingly concerned about the unsustainable use of our country's natural resources.

BirdLife South Africa's advocacy strategy is to ask questions and to promote critical thinking around exactly what sustainable development means in a South African context. BirdLife South Africa questions how serious the South African government's commitment is to meeting the country's international obligations linked to Rio+20 and other multilateral environmental agreements. With South Africa's biodiversity, and ultimately the people of South Africa's future, at stake, we need to put pressure on government to ensure that the negotiating position presented by the South African delegation at the Rio+20 meeting is not a façade. We cannot pretend to be concerned about the environment, and profess to be attending to our environmental commitments on one hand, but on the other allow the destruction and degradation of our natural resources.

BirdLife South Africa appeals to government to start giving true meaning to the notion of "sustainable development", by giving equal recognition to food production, water security, and the conservation of our cultural and natural heritage, especially when assessing development applications and most importantly when assessing mining applications. This will ensure that sustainable development is entrenched as an overarching principle in the growth path of our developing economy.

BirdLife South Africa, as the country's only dedicated bird conservation NGO, opposes unsustainable developments that could impact on endemic and threatened birds and their habitats, and uses the Important Bird Area (IBA) network to guide its participation in development and mining applications. BirdLife South Africa's level of participation in development applications is dependent on available resources, and in most instances this determines the type and extent of the role that the organization will play in campaigns. BirdLife South Africa unfortunately does not have the manpower and the finances to campaign against all unsustainable developments and largely uses the IBA network to influence its involvement. BirdLife South Africa may take a lead role with some campaign, as it recently did at Wakkerstroom, thus opposing specific developments applications, while in others may only challenge an application and play more of a supportive role (including the provision of advice and expertise to like-minded people and organisations).

BirdLife South Africa notes with grave concern the increase in mining applications in the Mpumalanga and Limpopo provinces, and more specifically the earmarking by government of the Waterberg and Soutpansberg regions in the Limpopo Province for mining. These provinces and regions remain critically important from biodiversity, water and food security perspectives, and they also support a variety of threatened and endemic bird species and a number of Important Bird Areas. BirdLife South Africa remains committed to the protection of these regions and other important areas around the country, and will oppose unsustainable development applications, especially when they threaten key bird species and their habitats. BirdLife South Africa will also provide support and expert advice to interested, concerned and affected parties, but within the constraints of its current capacity.

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Notes for the editor:

1. The mission of BirdLife South Africa is to promote the enjoyment, conservation, study and understanding of wild birds and their habitats.
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