



MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate use:

Johannesburg, 22 August 2012:

As Wednesday September 5th approaches, bosses will be scratching their heads on how to honour their secretaries on Secretary's Day – without asking them to order flowers for themselves.

A lunch? Chocolates? A letter? Flowers again?

Here's an innovative idea that ticks all the boxes: green, thoughtful, different, lasting, makes a real difference, can help a school, bragging rights. BirdLife South Africa is doing a scientific project to understand exactly what is happening to South Africa's Secretarybirds.

Yep, the long-legged ones with quills behind their ears. They stride across the African veldt meaningfully, apparently absorbed in their tasks, as hard-working as the best of secretaries. Catching snakes, mostly. Tracking them is tough, so a tracking device (worth R25 000) is needed to see where they go and what they do when they get there.

BirdLife South Africa hatched a plot to help bosses reward secretaries, or help companies reward all their secretaries. For R500 contributors get an elegant card to thank their secretaries, noting that their contribution will gather invaluable data on the Secretarybirds of South Africa. There are greater contributions too: for R1000 the secretary will get feedback on the tracked birds' movements, plus an original signed framed photograph, plus a serious contribution to a school. The school gets a BirdLife information pack on Secretarybird biology and conservation. For R5000 contributors get to co-sponsor a tracking device for a specific bird, plus card, monthly feedback, signed photograph, information pack to school.

This unusual gift is tax deductible and will enable secretaries and bosses to brag about the great work they are doing for this magnificent bird, now classified as "Globally Vulnerable" and in decline in our country's grasslands.

Of course any company is welcome to donate the entire tracking device, and rewards can be negotiated directly with BirdLife's Conservation Manager, Dr Hanneline Smit, who is heading up the research.

BirdLife has a proud history of success in saving endangered species, with its saving of seabirds having been awarded conservation prizes worldwide for dramatically cutting the deaths of albatrosses and other seabirds by more than 80 percent.

This Secretary's Day could make a difference to the future of *Sagittarius serpentarius*, a majestic creature, part of the South African Coat of Arms.

Contact BirdLife South Africa on secretary@birdlife.org.za or complete forms on the website birdlife.org.za/support-us/secretarys-day

Notes for the editor:

- For more information, please contact: Dr Hanneline Smit (082 453 4714).
- The vision of BirdLife South Africa is to promote the conservation, research, understanding, observation of and enjoyment of natural birds, and their habitats.
- South Africa has 844 bird species, of which 65 species only occur here and 125 (15%) are listed in *The Eskom Red Data Book of Birds of South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland* (Barnes 2000). With one of the highest levels of bird endemism in the world, South Africa has an important obligation to ensure their survival.
- BirdLife South Africa is the largest non-profit bird conservation organization in the country. It relies on donor funding and financial support from the public to carry out its critical conservation work.
- BirdLife South Africa contact details: Lewis House, 239 Barkston Drive, Blairgowrie, P.O. Box 515, Randburg, Johannesburg, South Africa, Tel. +27-11-7891122, Fax. +27-11-7895188, e-mail address: conservation@birdlife.org.za, website: www.birdlife.org.za