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MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate use

BirdLife South Africa's Dr Ross Wanless wins Environmentalist of the Year award

Johannesburg, 23 October 2014:

The prestigious SAB Environmentalist of the Year Award was made to Dr Ross Wanless, from BirdLife South Africa's Seabird Conservation Programme, at a ceremony in Johannesburg yesterday. Dr Wanless has overseen a number of impressive conservation achievements over the past six years at BirdLife South Africa, building on a career of seabird science and conservation work that started in 1997. Dr Wanless was unable to receive the award in person, as he is travelling internationally for work. BirdLife South Africa's CEO, Mark Anderson, received the award on Dr Wanless' behalf.

The SAB award recognised not just a lot of hard work over many years, but an individual who has been instrumental in delivering significant, lasting conservation outcomes. Very few conservation programmes can actually demonstrate tangible benefits for species they seek to conserve. It is still more exceptional for a programme to bring benefits to a suite of threatened species. BirdLife South Africa's extraordinary work to prevent the extinction of albatrosses and petrels is one such programme. Under the leadership of Dr Ross Wanless, the programme has used science, advocacy, persistence and win-win solutions to turn the tide against fisheries impacts on iconic seabirds. Earlier this year his team announced, via a research paper in the highly rated, international science journal *Animal Conservation*, that their efforts in the South African hake trawl fishery had caused a reduction in seabird mortality of up to 90%. Dr Wanless is currently in South Korea, running a workshop with the Korean tuna longline fleet to assist that fleet to adopt best practice measures for avoiding accidental seabird catches.

Dr Wanless has recreated the African Seabird Group and oversaw a successful bid for the group to host the second World Seabird Conference, to be in Cape Town in October next year; he is chair of the local organising committee and sits on the World Seabird Unions' conference

executive committee. He also created and oversees the annual Celebrate Our Seas festival which kicked off in the beginning of October as part of National Marine Week. He maintains strong links to the University of Cape Town, and is currently supervising a Masters and a PhD student.

“It’s a real honour to receive this sort of recognition, but I do need to acknowledge that I have an amazing team at BirdLife South Africa, and this award is theirs as much as mine” said Dr Wanless.

For more information, images or interviews please contact:

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Notes for Editors

- 1.) BirdLife South Africa is the local country partner of BirdLife International. BirdLife International is the world’s largest nature conservation Partnership with more than 120 BirdLife partners worldwide and growing, with almost 11million supporters, 7000 local conservation groups and 7400 staff. Find out more at www.birdlife.org or www.facebook.com/BirdLifeInternational.
- 2.) The vision of BirdLife South Africa is to promote the conservation, research, understanding, observation and enjoyment of natural birds and their habitats. BirdLife South Africa is the largest non-profit bird conservation organisation in the country, and relies on donor funding and financial support from the public to carry out its critical conservation work. For more information, visit www.birdlife.org.za.