



MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate use

CAPE TO VIC FALLS ENDURO-RIDE FOR ORANGE-BREASTED WAXBILLS

Johannesburg, 28 April 2015: Many bird species have recently suffered declines in numbers and contractions in ranges due to threats to their habitats. A long-distance solo bicycle ride, from Cape Town to Victoria Falls, is helping raise awareness about the conservation of one of our country's smallest and most colourful birds, the Orange-breasted Waxbill.

In conjunction with the Rare Finch Conservation Group, BirdLife South Africa has singled out the Orange-breasted Waxbill, a widespread bird species occurring from Senegal to eastern South Africa, as an indicator species of the health of moist grassland and wetland habitats, the waxbill's natural habitat. Although the Orange-breasted Waxbill is not currently a Red Data-listed species, recent observations suggest that less and less of these finches are present in areas where they were previously common. An initial phase of the project will focus on a detailed study of the key sites where the species occurs.

Eight Red Data-listed species, ranging from Near Threatened to Critically Endangered, plus all 84 common bird species that use a similar habitat to the Orange-breasted Waxbill, will benefit from the research and conservation collaboration between BirdLife South Africa and the Rare Finch Conservation Group.

On Tuesday 28 April, Eelco Meyjes, representing the Rare Finch Conservation Group, completed an epic solo bike ride for the Orange-breasted Waxbill. This incredible enduro-ride from Cape Town to

Victoria Falls, covered 3000 km and traversed three countries. Starting on 15 March, Eelco took about six weeks to complete the ride.

Despite numerous challenges on his way, including personal safety, staying healthy, technical issues with his bicycle, and camping with wild animals, there were fortunately no serious incidents.

To support Orange-breasted Waxbill and Common Bird conservation, you can support Eelco's ALL OR BUST pledge. Email your pledge of an amount of R500 or more, plus full name and contact details to editor@avitalk.co.za or sms details to 082 457 4936. Alternatively, to support Eelco in his quest to conserve our Orange-breasted Waxbills, please go to <http://www.birdlifesouthafrica.givengain.org>.

For more information, images or interviews please contact:

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Notes for Editors

BirdLife South Africa is the local country partner of BirdLife International. BirdLife International is the world's largest nature conservation Partnership with 120 BirdLife Partners worldwide and growing, with almost 11 million supporters, 7000 local conservation groups and 7400 staff. Find out more at www.birdlife.org or www.facebook.com/BirdLifeInternational

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.

Eelco Meyjes is a member of both the Rare Finch Conservation Group www.rarefinch.org (a non-profit organisation) and BirdLife South Africa.

NEVAREST has kindly sponsored Eelco's satellite tracking system to help support nature conservation. www.safesporttracking.co.za

Keeping common birds common

BirdLife South Africa would like to expand its current focus on threatened bird species to include projects on common birds, such as the Orange-breasted Waxbill. During species prioritisation exercises, common birds are not included or identified because of their non-threatened (non-Red Data Listed) status. Nonetheless, there is a wealth of threats responsible for the decline in numbers of common birds and these should be identified, assessed and prioritised. Common species in Europe and elsewhere have however shown recent declines, Farmland birds in particular have exhibited large declines (more than 50%) since 1980, resulting in a possible loss of more than 300 million birds.

More information about “keeping the common birds common” as part of the BirdLife International Preventing Extinctions Programme can be found at:

<http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/sowb/casestudy/62>

<http://www.birdlife.org/europe-and-central-asia/keeping-common-birds-common>