

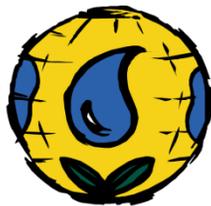
# The Flufftail Festival

CELEBRATING OUR WETLANDS

## The Ingula Partnership



**Middelpunt  
Wetland  
Trust**



**Water  
Wise**  
RAND WATER

## SANDTON CITY

### MEDIA RELEASE

**For immediate use**

**White-winged Flufftails could soon be homeless**

**Johannesburg, 28 January 2015:**

*Fifty percent of the world's wetlands have been destroyed. Without suitable wetland habitat, the White-winged Flufftail and many other species of animals and plants could soon be homeless. Due to wetland deterioration, ornithologists estimate that there are only 250 White-winged Flufftails left in the world, 50 of which are in South Africa.*

The tiny and secretive White-winged Flufftail, one of nine flufftail species in Africa, is listed as regionally and globally Critically Endangered, one step away from extinction in the wild. This species is only known to occur in South Africa and, nearly 4000 km away, in Ethiopia.

Named after the White-winged Flufftail, South Africa's rarest and most threatened wetland bird, BirdLife South Africa, in conjunction with Eskom, Rand Water, Sandton City and other partners, will host the inaugural Flufftail Festival at Sandton City from 3 to 8 February 2015. The purpose of this week-long festival is to celebrate and raise awareness of our planet's wetlands and associated biodiversity.

Most of the Flufftail Festival activities will take place in the Checkers Court, Sandton City, Johannesburg, and will include lectures, environmental education activities relating to water and water conservation, a 'Wetlands of Life' photographic competition and an exhibition of the winning photographs. The Flufftail Festival will seek to create awareness about the necessity to conserve White-winged Flufftails, as well as other waterbirds and their habitats.

Destruction and degradation of the White-winged Flufftail's high altitude wet grassland habitat have driven it to this precarious state. Urgent action is now needed in both Ethiopia and South Africa to better understand the Critically Endangered White-winged Flufftail's ecology and to address these threats and save it from extinction.

BirdLife South Africa, with the cooperation of the Middelpunt Wetland Trust, is raising the profile of the White-winged Flufftail and is mapping out a conservation plan for the species that includes the construction of a flufftail research facility at the National Zoological Gardens in Pretoria so that detailed behavioural and ecological studies can be undertaken.

Although BirdLife South Africa is undertaking several important projects to conserve migratory birds, the research on the White-winged Flufftail is considered unique, given the rarity and overall mystery of this bird. Whether or not the birds found in Ethiopia migrate to South Africa has long been an enigma. It is known that the birds are found in Ethiopia between July and September, and in South Africa from November to March with no recorded breeding in this southern part of its range. To shed light on the migratory connection between South Africa and Ethiopia, genetic and isotopic analyses are currently under way.

The habitat of the White-winged Flufftail and other wetland specialists in South Africa are threatened by degradation and destruction through pollution from mining and industrial effluents, domestic and commercial sewage, acid mine drainage, wetland drainage, conversion for agriculture, agricultural runoff and overgrazing by livestock. The Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBA) network highlights the conservation importance, and often provides protection to many wetland habitats. Therefore BirdLife South Africa actively opposes threats to these sites posed by mining and other developments.

**End**

**For further information, please contact:**

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## **Notes to Editors:**

### **BirdLife South Africa**

- This work is supported by the BirdLife International Preventing Extinctions Programme through funding from the BirdLife Species Champion, Eskom.
- 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 almost 11 million supporters.
- 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.
- The vision of BirdLife South Africa is to promote the conservation, research, understanding, observation of and enjoyment of natural birds, and their habitats.
- Birds are important environmental indicators, the proverbial "canaries in the coal mine". By focusing on birds, and the sites and the habitats on which they depend, BirdLife South Africa aims to improve the quality of life for birds, for other wildlife and ultimately for people.
- Ornithologists are of the opinion that fewer than 250 adult White-winged Flufftails remain in the wild and that the South African population is estimated to number less than 50 birds.
- On 1 February, Dave Chamberlain will start a six day run from Dullstroom to Sandton City in Johannesburg in aid of the White-winged Flufftail. Dave will cover, on average, about 50 km per day, pulling a trailer containing his food supplies, and using the trailer as a make-shift shelter at night.
- To make a contribution towards the White-winged Flufftail project, go to <http://birdlifesouthafrica.givengain.org> and click on "Dave Chamberlain's Flufftail Run" to make a donation. Alternatively, please contact Linda van den Heever at [linda.vdheever@birdlife.org.za](mailto:linda.vdheever@birdlife.org.za) or +27 (11) 789 1122.
- The Middelpunt Wetland Trust has long understood the need to protect the vegetation at the Berga breeding site, Ethiopia against overgrazing and grass cutting during the July/August breeding season. As a means of gaining the support of the local community, the Trust has provided financial support over the past ten years for the building of a school for the community. Today, 700 children receive their primary school education in the village. Well aware of the value of the flufftail to the community, the site support group patrols the wetland during the breeding season to prevent grazing and grass cutting.
- <http://www.birdlife.org.za/events/flufftail-festival> For more information, visit [www.birdlife.org.za](http://www.birdlife.org.za)

### **Eskom**

- Eskom has partnered with BirdLife South Africa and Middelpunt Wetland Trust over the past ten years to safeguard the Ingula wetland habitat for a number of threatened species, including the White-winged Flufftail. The Ingula conservation area, spanning the Free State and KwaZulu-Natal, covers more than 12 000 ha, and is protects important ecosystems and threatened species.