



## MEDIA RELEASE

**For immediate use**

### **Running in aid of the rarest Flufftail**

**Johannesburg, 19 January 2015:**

*From 3 to 8 February 2015, during the inaugural Flufftail Festival, BirdLife South Africa will be celebrating a very special bird. White-winged Flufftails are secretive jewels of a few South African high-altitude wetlands. They are globally and regionally Critically Endangered and in urgent need of our protection. On 1 February, Dave Chamberlain will start a six day run from Dullstroom to Sandton City in Johannesburg to raise awareness about their plight.*

From 3 to 8 February, BirdLife South Africa, in conjunction with Eskom, Rand Water, Sandton City and other partners, will be holding the inaugural Flufftail Festival at Sandton City. The purpose of this week-long festival is to celebrate and raise awareness of our planet's wetlands and associated biodiversity. Named after the White-winged Flufftail, one of South Africa's rarest birds, the Flufftail Festival will seek to create awareness amongst young and old about the necessity to conserve our planet's precious freshwater resources, wetland habitats and waterbirds.

Four years ago, Dave Chamberlain, a former dive instructor from Pretoria, accepted a dare from his parents and ran the length of Argentina so that he could catch a boat headed for the Antarctic. Since then he has combined his passion for running, adventure and the environment, by completing two further projects in aid of nature conservation: a 2700 km run from Walvis Bay to Port Elizabeth in aid of the African Penguin, as well as a 7800 km, five month epic covering the breadth of Canada in aid of the Polar Bear, all while pushing his food supplies and personal belongings in a pram. His next project, a year-long attempt to run from Vladivostok to Reykjavik across Russia and Europe, will aim to raise awareness of wetlands and migratory birds.

In preparation for the Russian run, and in aid of one of South Africa's rarest wetland specialists, the White-winged Flufftail, Dave will run 281 km from Middelpunt Farm near Dullstroom, Mpumalanga (the iconic home of White-winged Flufftails in South Africa), to Sandton City in Johannesburg during the week of the Flufftail Festival. His journey will begin on Sunday, 1 February, at Middelpunt, and end at Sandton City on Friday evening, 6 February. 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. His arrival at Sandton City Mall will coincide with a function to be held in the Checkers Forecourt on Friday evening.

The White-winged Flufftail is one of nine flufftail species in Africa, and only known to occur in South Africa and, nearly 4000 km away, in Ethiopia. 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. The preferred high altitude wetland habitat in South Africa, which is mostly limited to Mpumalanga, Free State and KwaZulu-Natal, is threatened by

habitat degradation and destruction including pollution from industrial and mining effluents, domestic and commercial sewage, agricultural runoff and litter. The three Ethiopian wetlands where the birds are known to occur and breed are threatened by overgrazing and grass-cutting. BirdLife South Africa and the Middelpunt Wetland Trust have rolled out a number of research projects to focus on the conservation of the White-winged Flufftail.

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.

**End**

**For further information, please contact:**

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**Notes to Editors:**

**About Birdlife South Africa**

- 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.
- BirdLife South Africa, with the cooperation of the Middelpunt Wetland Trust, is raising the profile of the Critically Endangered 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.
- The Flufftail Festival is linked to World Wetlands Day on 2 February, which is celebrated worldwide to raise awareness of wetlands. Most of the activities will take place in Sandton City, Johannesburg, and will include lectures, environmental education activities, a ‘Wetlands of Life’ photographic competition and an exhibition of the winning photographs.
- Read more on the BirdLife International Preventing Extinctions Programme at <http://www.birdlife.org/extinction/> and <http://www.birdlife.org.za/conservation/threatened-species>
- For more information, visit [www.birdlife.org.za](http://www.birdlife.org.za)