



MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate use

Celebrate World Sparrow Day on 20 March 2015

Johannesburg, 19 March 2015:

To raise awareness of sparrows and the need to conserve general urban biodiversity, World Sparrow Day will be celebrated on 20 March 2015.

Sparrows are some of the most ubiquitous birds on the planet and as such are often taken for granted. Five species of sparrow occur in South Africa. The Cape Sparrow is a well-known near-endemic to southern Africa, and is found in a wide range of habitats, from urban parks and gardens to the arid savanna of the Kalahari, where they can occur in large flocks. The Southern Grey-headed Sparrow is equally common but, due to its fairly non-descript plumage, is often misidentified or even overlooked. The common House Sparrow, another abundant resident of our urban settlements, was introduced into Durban from the northern hemisphere in the 1800s. Less well-known are the Great Sparrow, which superficially resembles the House Sparrow, and the Yellow-throated Petronia which, due to its solitary and unobtrusive nature, is easily overlooked.

As is often the case with common species, the adaptability and resourcefulness of sparrows are rarely appreciated. In light of this the Nature Forever Society (of India) has declared 20 March 2015 to be World Sparrow Day. The purpose of the initiative is not only to celebrate these well-known visitors to our gardens, but also to raise awareness of the importance of conserving and nurturing all common birds and general urban biodiversity.

The spirit of World Sparrow Day is in keeping with BirdLife South Africa's recently launched Keeping Common Birds Common Project, an initiative of the BirdLife International Preventing Extinctions Programme. An alarming decline in the numbers of common European farmland birds has highlighted the necessity to look after our common bird species while they are still considered to be common. Prevention, when it comes to conservation, is infinitely better than cure as extinction cannot be reversed.

The theme for this year's World Sparrow Day is "I LOVE Sparrows", and individuals and organisations are encouraged to visit the World Sparrow Day website at www.worldsparrowday.org to offer their support. Together we can collectively inspire as many people as possible to conserve sparrows, other birds and their habitat across the planet.

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 more than 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.
- For more information, visit www.birdlife.org.za
- World Sparrow Day is an initiative of the Nature Forever Society, a registered charitable trust working for the conservation of common fauna and flora in urban habitats. For more information visit www.natureforever.org.