



MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate use

BirdLife South Africa launches review of the extinction risk faced by region's bird species

Johannesburg, 18 November 2015: The state of conservation in the region is no better reflected than in the Red Data Books, which assess the extinction threats that plants, reptiles or birds face. Birds are appropriate indicators of ecosystem health because they are popular and well studied, and the availability of significant, long-term datasets in South Africa makes birds a good choice for early-warning system for climate change impacts and other systematic, ecosystem-wide threats to broader biodiversity. The 2015 Eskom Red Data Book of Birds of South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland is an updated and peer-reviewed conservation status assessment of the 854 bird species occurring in South Africa, including the Prince Edward Islands, Lesotho and Swaziland, undertaken in collaboration between BirdLife South Africa, the Animal Demography Unit of the University of Cape Town, and the South African National Biodiversity Institute. The revision of the Red Data Book was sponsored by Eskom.

This publication is long overdue, as the last regional red list was published in 2000. Since then, ecosystems and habitats in the region have been classified and assigned their own threat levels, which has painted a rather disheartening picture; many habitats are under significant threat or in a bad state of fragmentation and/or degradation. Given the widespread degradation and destruction of our natural resources, which both humans and our indigenous bird species are dependent, it was imperative that the extinction risks faced by the region's bird species were assessed, as there was a high likelihood that birds would have been significantly affected.

The IUCN Red List uses quantitative criteria based on population size, rate of decline, and area of distribution to assign species to one of seven relative extinction risk, ranging from 'Critically Endangered' to 'Least Concern'. A mammoth 854 bird species were assessed, and Martin Taylor, lead editor and conservation ornithologist based at BirdLife South Africa, commented: "132 threatened species are now listed as regionally threatened, of which 47 are 'Near Threatened' and the remainder at higher threat levels. Worryingly, the number of species in the

Critically Endangered category (which is one step from extinct) has increased from five to 13 since 2000. Two groups stand out – 22 of the 79 raptors occurring in the region (25%) are now considered threatened. Of great concern is the plight of the scavenging raptors with most of South Africa's vulture species, as well as the Tawny Eagle *Aquila rapax* and Bateleur *Terathopius ecaudatus*, two obligate scavengers, being listed as Endangered or Critically Endangered. The second group, seabirds, have fared even worse, deteriorating at a faster rate than any other comparable groups of birds. "Forty-five seabird species are now on the regional red list, accounting for 34% of all threatened bird species in the region. The poor conservation status of seabirds is a consequence of several factors with lack of food, accidental deaths during fishing, and the impact of introduced species, such as cats and mice on South Africa's sub-Antarctic Prince Edward islands, playing an important role" said Dr Ross Wanless, BirdLife South Africa's Seabird Conservation Programme Manager and co-editor of the book.

Global extinction is, of course, the final step in the deterioration of species' conservation status, and is also irreversible. The purpose of the Red List categorisations is to produce a relative estimate of the likelihood of extinction. "There is so much to do for bird conservation, that prioritising is essential. The Red Data Book represents an important tool to do this. The challenge now is to marshal resources and work together towards ensuring that the reversal of the extinction wave is well underway by the time the next regional assessment is undertaken." commented Mark D. Anderson, CEO of BirdLife South Africa.

The publication is available from the BirdLife South Africa Head Office at a cost of R 325 incl. VAT (Please contact membership@birdlife.org.za). For any enquiries please contact Martin Taylor (martin.taylor@birdlife.org.za).

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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 11 million supporters, 7000 local conservation groups and 7400 staff. Find out more at www.birdlife.org or www.facebook.com/BirdLifeInternational.
- 2.) BirdLife South Africa strives to conserve birds, their habitats and biodiversity through scientifically-based programmes, through supporting the sustainable and equitable use of natural resources and through encouraging people to enjoy and value nature. 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.