



MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate use

Secretarybird tracked from nestling to breeding: a first for science!

Johannesburg, 11 December 2015: *Taemane, a Secretarybird tracked with a sophisticated satellite tracking device, became the first Secretarybird ever to be tracked from eight weeks of age to first breeding.*

Ernst Retief, one of BirdLife South Africa's Regional Conservation Managers, reported that the bird, a male, was fitted with a tracking device on 5 April 2013 on a farm near Warden in the Free State. The bird was estimated to have hatched during January 2013, so it is now almost three years old. Taemane visited various parts of the Free State after leaving the area of the nest before moving south to the KwaZulu-Natal south coast, then moved inland and settled on a farm near Ixopo for a few months. From there he returned to the Free State where he continued to spend time in the grasslands south of Memel.

During the last few weeks the location points from Taemane's satellite tracking device were all from the same locality. Taemane was either dead or breeding! As these points overlapping with a tree, BirdLife South Africa's conservationists were hoping that Taemane was breeding. Ernst Retief made contact with the local farmer, who then accompanied him to the site on 6 December. Taemane was found on a nest, the tracking device clearly visible and in place. With him on the nest were two chicks, barely a week old.

This breeding event is important for many reasons. It is the first time that a Secretarybird has been tracked from a young age to first breeding, providing valuable information which will assist researchers to understand important aspects of the species' biology. It also provides the first ever information of the age of first breeding of Secretarybirds.

Dr Hanneline Smit-Robinson, Manager: Terrestrial Bird Conservation Programme at BirdLife South Africa, stated that “the scientific information gained on date of first breeding help us to understand the Secretarybird’s life history and biology. The understanding we now have about Secretarybirds’ movements and habitat use will assist our conservation endeavors”.

Ernst Retief added that BirdLife South Africa will continue to monitor the nest and movement of Taemane during the breeding period, thus obtaining valuable information about the foraging patterns of the species while breeding.

BirdLife South Africa is grateful to E. Oppenheimer and Son for sponsoring Taemane’s tracking device. Taemane means diamond in Setswana and Sesotho. Dr Duncan MacFadyen, Manager: Research and Conservation at E. Oppenheimer and Son, said “we are absolutely delighted with the news that Taemane has been recorded breeding. The information gained over this period will give great insights into the breeding behaviour of this iconic species. Taemane is making history, being the first ever Secretarybird to be tracked from a chick to a breeding adult. We look forward to obtaining many more years of good data from Taemane and for this hugely valuable project contributing to the conservation of this threatened species”.

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.

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.

About the Secretarybird project:

- In 2011 BirdLife South Africa launched a project to study the Secretarybird. The research project was initiated in the same year that the threatened status of the Secretarybird was changed to globally Vulnerable. In the past four years we have gained a better understanding of the biology

and conservation of the Secretarybird, including the vast distances they travel after leaving the nest and the numerous and significant threats they face. The aim of our study is to determine the species' preferred habitat, the dispersal patterns of juveniles, and to identify the threats responsible for the apparent high mortality rate of Secretarybirds.

- To make a contribution towards the Secretarybird project, please contact Linda van den Heever at linda.vdheever@birdlife.org.za or +27 (11) 789 1122.
- This work would not be possible without the support of the BirdLife International Preventing Extinctions Programme through funding from the national Species Champion, Petra Diamonds. Read more on the BirdLife International Preventing Extinctions Programme at <http://www.birdlife.org/extinction/> and <http://www.birdlife.org.za/conservation/threatened-species>