



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

**Embargo: 12 September 2015**

### **THE LAST STAND FOR OUR BIRDS**

**Johannesburg, 12 September 2015:**

One-third of the 112 most important sites for nature in South Africa are facing imminent danger of irreversible damage, according to a new South African IBA Status Report published today by BirdLife South Africa.

These sites – known as Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs) – are threatened by invasive species, changes in habitats through incorrect burning practices, and agricultural expansion or mismanagement. Unprotected IBAs in particular are deteriorating at a concerning rate, most especially in grasslands, wetlands and fynbos, but habitats in protected IBAs are also showing signs of deterioration. Over 85% of all IBAs face high to very high levels of threats, and there is little distinction between protected and unprotected IBAs in this regard. The IBAs with the highest and most imminent threats will be included in BirdLife International's list of IBAs in Danger, the global list of priority sites identified for urgent action.

This South African IBA Status Report is accompanied by a revised National IBA Directory, building on and up-dating the first such inventory published in 1998. It provides updated information of the most important aspect of each of these 112 IBAs, including the geography and climate of the area, the list of the bird species found at the IBA, the biggest threats to the site, and what conservation action is taking place to secure the IBA. This publication can be used by conservation practitioners and planners to prioritise their work, by developers who need to understand the sensitivity of an area, and can even be used by bird enthusiasts to plan a birding trip.

The 112 IBAs in South Africa are the last stand for bird conservation on a landscape level. Protecting these sites has benefits not only for South Africa's birds, but also for other animals, plants and the vital ecological services these sites provide to people. These services include providing us with fresh water, managing floods, controlling disease, and providing grazing lands for livestock farming. Conserving IBAs is also important for attaining our government's environmental commitments like the Convention on Biological Diversity's Aichi Target 11 that calls for the expansion of terrestrial Protected Areas by at least 17%, and the Convention on Migratory Species. Therefore, their deteriorating status is a very high concern which requires immediate attention from government agencies and other stakeholders.

The main recommendations from the IBA Status Report to remedy this situation include that government needs to allocate more resources towards managing protected areas and expanding the protected areas network through biodiversity stewardship. That IBAs should be used as a first cut when identifying priority areas for conservation, including for protected area expansion. By following the published management guidelines, the agricultural sector is able to manage their lands for the parallel purposes of producing livestock, improving veld condition and conserving biodiversity. IBAs should be considered as red flags and often exclusion areas when other development options are being considered, such as mining.

While both these publications are milestones for bird conservation, they need to be seen as the spearhead which will now be used to lobby, plan and implement effective conservation for birds, their habitats and other biodiversity.

Both the revised IBA Directory and IBA Status Report can be bought in hard copy from BirdLife South Africa's IBA Programme (011 789 1122, [daniel.marnewick@birdlife.org.za](mailto:daniel.marnewick@birdlife.org.za)), or the electronic versions can be downloaded for free from <http://www.birdlife.org.za/conservation/important-bird-areas/documents-and-downloads>.

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**Notes to Editors:**

**Additional information**

South Africa has as an extraordinary diversity of life. With 846 bird species, 8% of the world's bird species, and a diversity of other life and habitat types, it is not always easy to prioritise the most important sites for conservation. As a developing economy, South Africa has to accommodate competing land uses and therefore we need to focus conservation efforts on habitats and sites of irreplaceable worth. Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas, or IBAs, are just that, the most important sites for conserving our birds and the rich diversity of life associated with birds. The IBA network is comprised of sites of global significance for bird conservation, and may be considered the minimum set of sites essential to ensuring the survival of the world's birds. The consequences of losing any one of these sites would be disproportionately large.

**About Birdlife South Africa**

- BirdLife South Africa's IBA Programme is supported by a number of funders: Mitsui & Co., Trencor, WWF Table Mountain Fund, WWF Nedbank Green Trust, Rupert Natuurstigting, Rand Merchant Bank, Sappi, Honda SA, CEPF and Mr Price.
- 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.
- 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's IBA Programme aims to improve the quality of life for birds, for other wildlife, and ultimately for people.

- To make a contribution towards the IBA Fund, go to <http://birdlifesouthafrica.givengain.org> and click on “IBA Fund” to make a donation. Alternatively, please contact Daniel Marnewick at [daniel.marnewick@birdlife.org.za](mailto:daniel.marnewick@birdlife.org.za) or +27 (11) 789 1122.
- The IBAs in Danger initiative of BirdLife International identifies IBAs facing very high levels of threats based on their scope, timing and scale. The current list includes 358 IBAs from 102 countries. For more information, visit <http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/info/IBAsInDanger>.
- For more information, visit [www.birdlife.org.za](http://www.birdlife.org.za).