



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

**For immediate use**

### **Bird of the Year 2015**

**Johannesburg, 23 January 2015:**

The Bird of the Year for 2015 is the famous five cent bird, South Africa's national bird, the Blue Crane.

"Selecting this Crane will help everyone realise the need to conserve the country's wetlands and grasslands," BirdLife South Africa's Chief Executive Officer Mark Anderson said.

This decade has seen Tristan Albatross, White-winged Flufftail, Barn Swallow, African Fish Eagle and Lesser Flamingo all getting the honour, but this year it is the iconic Blue Crane.

'Bird of the Year' is BirdLife South Africa's annual initiative for awareness about birds and bird habitat conservation. The Bird of the Year 2015 initiative is proudly sponsored by Waltons. "Each year choosing the bird is highly contested, with nominations and furious voting and support for various species, but this year the Blue Crane won," said Nikki McCartney, events manager of BirdLife South Africa.

Educating people is a key component of BirdLife South Africa's conservation work. The bird conservation NGO is developing learning materials using the Blue Crane as a flagship species. This will be an incentive to conserve wetlands and grasslands. The Blue Crane, other crane species and many other less charismatic, but equally important species, depend on these habitats.

The Blue Crane is endemic (only found in a certain region) to southern Africa, with more than 99% of the population occurring within South Africa. A small breeding population occurs in northern Namibia, in and around Etosha Pan.

"As the five cent bird, the Blue Crane is generally well-known to South Africans," said Anderson. "This, and its attractive and charismatic life style, account for its popularity. It is a good choice for Bird of the Year 2015," he added.

Poisoning, habitat alteration, and power line collisions are all significant threats to Blue Cranes. Poisoning occurs intentionally and inadvertently. Loss of South Africa's natural grasslands threatens Blue Crane habitat.

Mainly found on privately owned farms, a key to their conservation is good relationships between landowners and conservation agencies to ensure appropriate management of these environments.

The African Crane Conservation Programme of the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) works on awareness and environmental education for landowners, local communities and other stakeholders; reducing crane/farmer conflicts, community involvement in sustainable use and conservation of wetlands and grasslands, monitoring of crane populations, the trade in captive cranes, and works with Eskom to reduce power-line collisions.

**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](http://www.birdlife.org.za)

**About Waltons**

- As the largest office products distributor in the country, Waltons offers more than quality products and services – it offers tools for growth, and over time the company has achieved iconic brand status in South Africa. Waltons' extensive national footprint and delivery network allows it to deliver essential office and schools supplies across the country
- Waltons unmatched range includes: Stationery, Technology, Office Furniture and Optiplan Filing as well as Catering and Hygiene products for corporate customers and Scholastic Products for educational institutions and students
- As a Level 2 Black Economic Empowerment contributor, and a proud member of the Bidvest Group, Waltons is dedicated to growing loyal customers by providing unmatched customer experiences, and the best solutions for business