

The Flufftail Festival

CELEBRATING OUR WETLANDS



MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate use

Protect our wetlands. Save the Flufftail!

The White-winged Flufftail, one of the world's rarest birds, is dependent on wetlands for its survival. We appeal to South Africans, who are passionate about the conservation of our country's natural heritage, to make a small contribution to this flufftail. We would like to ensure that this small wetland bird will never be homeless in the wild.

Johannesburg, 5 February 2016:

The White-winged Flufftail is listed as Critically Endangered, one step away from extinction in the wild. There's a race against time to ensure that it does not follow the Passenger Pigeon and Dodo, two birds which are now extinct.

Named after this very threatened wetland bird, BirdLife South Africa, Rand Water (Water Wise) and Eskom are hosting the annual Flufftail Festival at Cresta Shopping Centre from 2-8 February 2016. The Flufftail Festival aims to create awareness about water, our country's scarcest resource, wetlands, a threatened habitat, and waterbirds and other aquatic animals. The Flufftail Festival is linked to World Wetlands Day, a global event celebrating wetlands worldwide on 2 February.

Destruction and degradation of the White-winged Flufftail's high altitude wet grassland habitat have resulted in a situation where its survival in the wild is now uncertain. White-winged Flufftails are also one of South Africa's rarest birds, with an estimated 50 birds left in the country and perhaps 250 remaining throughout its global range. The species is only known to occur with any regularity in Ethiopia and South Africa, more than 4000 km apart.

A conservation plan for the White-winged Flufftail has been drafted and the implementation thereof is through the collaborative efforts of BirdLife South Africa, the Middelpunt Wetland Trust and the Ethiopian Wildlife and Natural History Society (The BirdLife Partner in Ethiopia).

In order to conserve the White-winged Flufftail, which now has precariously low numbers, management interventions are necessary. The conservation plan therefore includes the construction of a flufftail research facility at the National Zoological Gardens in Pretoria. According to Dr Hanneline Smit-Robinson, Manager: Terrestrial Bird Conservation Programme at BirdLife South Africa, it is important to master the breeding of the species in captivity and to learn more about its biology and behaviour if we are to ensure the species' survival in the wild. "We appeal to members of the public to make a small contribution so that we can ensure that the species will never be homeless in the wild".

Our conservation goals also include the protection of the preferred habitat of the White-winged Flufftail. In South Africa, at one of the sites where the White-winged Flufftail has been recorded, 7000 ha of habitat is currently managed for the conservation of the species and other threatened bird species through the Ingula Partnership, a partnership between Eskom, BirdLife South Africa and Middelpunt Wetland Trust. This area includes the Bedford/Chatsworth wetland, listed as an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area and situated on Eskom's Ingula Pumped Storage Scheme site.

In Ethiopia, the vegetation at Berga, the only remaining known breeding site, is protected against overgrazing and grass cutting through the involvement of a site support group who patrols the wetland during the July/August breeding season to prevent grazing and grass cutting. As a means of gaining the support of the local community, the Middelpunt Wetland Trust has provided financial support over the past ten years for the building of a school for the community, named the Flufftail School. Today, 1200 children receive their primary school education in the village.

The 2016 Flufftail Festival takes the form of a giant maze. People, and especially families with children, are encouraged to visit the exhibition at the banking court at Cresta Shopping Centre, to learn more about water, wetlands, waterbirds and the plight of the White-winged Flufftail. People who visit the Flufftail Festival on the weekend can also have their photograph taken "in a wetland" wearing various props (such as gumboots and binoculars). The first 800 groups will receive these images, both hardcopies and electronic copies, for free. Each participant will also receive a sticker and fun and informative brochures. Those who have correctly completed entry forms stand a chance to win one of many prizes, including cameras, shopping vouchers, restaurant vouchers, Barnyard Theatre tickets and much more.

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Notes to Editors:

About Flufftail Festival

- There's more information at www.birdlife.org.za
- To contribute to this project: BirdLife South Africa, First National Bank, Randburg, Acc no. 62067506281, Branch code 254005. (Please use *Flufftail* as reference and forward proof of payment to conservation@birdlife.org.za).
- The conservation work on the White-winged Flufftail undertaken by BirdLife South Africa is supported by the BirdLife International Preventing Extinctions Programme through funding from the BirdLife Species Champions, Eskom and Airports Company South Africa.
- For images to be used with articles, please contact Linda van den Heever at linda.vdheever@birdlife.org.za.