

The Flufftail Festival

CELEBRATING OUR WETLANDS



MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate use

Increasing threats to the survival of South Africa's waterbirds

More than 140 waterbirds are found in southern Africa, many of which are dependent on wetlands for their survival. Wetlands are not only important to the birds and the myriad of other biodiversity inhabiting them, but they are also crucial to humans. Given the current drought conditions in our water scarce country, it is essential to raise awareness about the conservation of this critical resource.

Johannesburg, 6 February 2016:

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 is linked to World Wetlands Day, a global event celebrating wetlands worldwide on 2 February.

Wetlands are areas saturated permanently, or seasonally, with water and support an ecosystem of aquatic plants and animals. Wetlands are important to humans as the plants growing in these wetlands slow down the flow of water, helping to sustain the water table. Wetlands also play an important role in water purification, by removing toxins and pollutants. The Flufftail Festival aims to create awareness about the importance and conservation of this threatened habitat, wetlands.

Waterbirds refer to species dependent on freshwater and estuarine ecosystems for foraging, in other words, species which are dependent on wetlands for their survival. Wetlands are also important for the successful breeding of some threatened large birds species, such as Wattled Crane and Grey Crowned Crane. Wetlands provide a habitat for species which roost in reed beds in large numbers, such as swallows.

Thirteen percent (19 species) of our 141 waterbirds are currently listed in The 2015 Eskom Red Data Book of Birds of South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland. We celebrate some good news, such as the downlisting and now least concern status of the migratory Corn Crake and resident African Black Oystercatcher due to conservation intervention. However 10 waterbirds (Eurasian Curlew, Maccoa Duck, Lesser Jacana, Mangrove Kingfisher, Great White Pelican, Yellow-billed Stork, Black Stork, African Pygmy Goose, Caspian Tern and Damara Tern) are listed in more threatened categories in The 2015 Eskom Red Data Book of Birds compared to their status 15 years ago. South Africa's wetlands are the southern destination for many migratory wading birds. Waders are particular sensitive indicators of the environment. Mainly due to habitat loss and disturbance, 40% of long distant migrant waders utilising the African-Eurasian flyway have shown recent population declines.

About 45% of South Africa's Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs) have wetlands. These IBAs are often prioritised for conservation intervention by BirdLife South Africa because they hold this threatened ecosystem type and the associated birds, and often face high levels of threats, e.g. the Steenkampsberg, Grasslands, Chrissie Pans and Verlorenvlei IBAs.

The Flufftail Festival is named after the Critically Endangered White-winged Flufftail, a species which is dependent on wetland habitats. Only an estimated 250 birds remain throughout its range in the wild. The White-winged Flufftail is one of nine flufftail species in Africa, and only known to occur in South Africa and, nearly 4000 km away, in Ethiopia. The species survival in the wild is uncertain due to the destruction and degradation of the White-winged Flufftail's high altitude wetland habitat.

The Flufftail Festival aims to raise awareness of water, a critical resource in our water scarce country. It further focuses on the conservation of wetlands, the home of many waterbirds and the Critically Endangered White-winged Flufftail. The current exhibition at the banking court at Cresta Shopping Centre takes the form of a giant maze. We encourage families, adults and children to visit us to learn more about water, wetlands and waterbirds. Those who enter our lucky draw competition stand a chance to win one of many prizes, including shopping vouchers, restaurant vouchers, Barnyard Theatre tickets, cameras and much more. Fun photos will also be taken over the weekend "in a wetland booth" inside the maze. A free hard copy will be printed for the first 800 groups at the maze and electronic copies will be available on request.

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For further information, please contact:

Mark Anderson at ceo@birdlife.org.za (011 789 1122)

Deidre Herbst at KhumalNP@eskom.co.za / HerbstDL@eskom.co.za (011 800 3565)

Meagan Donnelly at mdonnell@randwater.co.za (011 724 9351)

Notes to Editors:

About Flufftail Festival

- There's more information at www.birdlife.org.za
- For images to be used with articles, please contact Linda van den Heever at linda.vdheever@birdlife.org.za.