



MEDIA RELEASE

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Three's a crowd, more's a colony: Crowd funding for a new colony of the African Penguin

Cape Town, 19 July 2016 – The iconic African Penguin is under threat but you can help us to help them. BirdLife South Africa and its partners are working towards establishing new colonies for the African Penguin to help boost their numbers. To do this BirdLife South Africa is taking part in a Seabirds Challenge Grant hosted by the crowd funding platform Experiment to raise funds for this unique project.

Between the western and eastern strongholds for this species lies 600 km of coastline with no suitable islands. Should a natural or man-made disaster strike in either of the strongholds areas, more than half the global population could be lost. It is to prevent such a catastrophe that BirdLife South Africa is planning to establish new penguin colonies in this 600 km gap.

African Penguins tend to breed on islands, where they are protected from terrestrial mammalian predators. The exceptions are of course the internationally renowned Boulders Beach and Betty's Bay colonies, which thrive because the proximity of humans reduces the number of predators. Penguins that have tried to nest elsewhere on the mainland, away from human settlements, have fallen prey to carnivorous such as leopards and caracals.

While creating a new colony has many components, the main goal for this fundraising drive relates to possible predators at the two chosen sites for the new colony. The project is being led by Christina Hagen, the Pamela Isdell Fellow of Penguin Conservation at BirdLife South Africa. Hagen has worked tirelessly to locate suitable sites for the colonies and, together with Experiment, she hopes to raise enough funds to tackle the next and crucial part of this project.

Hagen explains "For this predator monitoring project we will install camera traps at the sites in strategic positions to record potential penguin predators in the area, so we know what predator deterrent and management procedures we need to have in place to protect the new colonies". The camera traps will also be used for long-term monitoring at the sites as the colonies become established.

Mark D. Anderson, CEO of BirdLife South Africa, says "There's a massive challenge to save Africa's only penguin from extinction and the penguins need all the help they can get. Establishing new mainland colonies are immensely important management interventions."

BirdLife South Africa has partnered with several organisations to achieve the goal of establishing new colonies, including the Nature's Valley Trust, BirdLife Plettenberg Bay and the Population Reinforcement Working Group (a group of diverse penguin conservation and management organisations).

The project has 30 days remaining to meet a funding target of \$5,400. To donate or find out more visit www.experiment.com/africanpenguin

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Notes for the editor:

1. The mission of BirdLife South Africa is to promote the enjoyment, conservation, study and understanding of wild birds and their habitats.
2. BirdLife South Africa contact details: Isdell House, 17 Hume Road, Dunkeld West 2196, Johannesburg, South Africa, Tel. +27-11-7891122, Fax. +27-11-7895188, e-mail address: info@birdlife.org.za, website: www.birdlife.org.za
3. African Penguins are under threat from a scarcity of food (driven by the shift in distribution of their prey and localised depletion from fishing around breeding colonies), oil spills, predation by seals and gulls and a lack of suitable breeding habitat. The South African population has decreased from approximately 141 000 pairs in the 1950s to fewer than 19 000 pairs in 2015. For more information visit: <http://www.birdlife.org.za/conservation/seabird-conservation/african-penguin-conservation>
4. Sites for the new colony are being investigated at De Hoop Nature Reserve and Plettenberg Bay. Fish abundance surveys are also being conducted to determine the presence a suitable prey species.
5. Experiment is a crowd funding platform promoting scientific research and helps researchers to find innovative ways to raise necessary funds for their projects. Experiment recently surpassed \$800,000 in total research funding raised. The site has been featured in The Economist, Forbes, Nature, and The New York Times.