



JOINT MEDIA RELEASE
GreenMatter and BirdLife South Africa

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BirdLife South Africa supports the development of marine biodiversity skills

Cape Town, 9 September 2013. Biodiversity management underpins the very essence of life as we know it. Biodiversity professionals, therefore play a significant role in conserving and managing our ecosystems and in ensuring a sustainable future for current and future generations. BirdLife South Africa (BLSA) and GreenMatter, the implementing network for the national Biodiversity Human Capital Development Strategy (BHCDS), are partnering to integrate skills development and careers engagement into the upcoming Save the Seabirds Festival (SOS Festival) taking place during National Marine Week (7-13 October 2013).

"South Africa's marine ecosystems are under threat and are the most poorly protected of all our ecosystems. Species such as the African Penguin, which play the role of an early warning system for environmental threats, are rapidly decreasing in number. To respond effectively to this and other environmental issues, we need a pool of cross-disciplinary experts to keep our ecosystems intact," states Dr Ross Wanless, Seabird Division Manager, BLSA and Africa Coordinator, BirdLife International Global Seabird Programme.

"The skills development and careers programme will complement both the Department of Environment Affairs National Marine Week and the SOS Festival campaigns. South Africa has some of the world's most renowned biodiversity specialists, however the development and retention of South African biodiversity practitioners, managers and researchers has

regrettably not kept pace with the urgency of our environmental needs," says Dr. Sibusiso Manzini, Executive Programme Director, GreenMatter.

"The planned skills development and careers programme for the SOS Festival will create opportunities for students and young professionals to engage with experts in the field, through Career Coffee Lounges and a robust Expert Panel Discussion at the University of Cape Town. Contributing experts will include marine specialists, resource economists, heads of sustainability initiatives, researchers and leaders from the environmental, public and private sectors," states Manzini.

"Effectively managing our ecosystems not only preserves our amazing marine biodiversity, it is also critical for job creation and business opportunities created through the commercial fisheries that sustain local communities and drive our economy. The SOS Festival provides a public platform to create and celebrate positive shifts in attitudes, behaviour and national support for biodiversity and the skills and expertise needed in South Africa," says Wanless.

The SOS Festival has been running since 2009 and has become one of BLSA's major annual events. BLSA's intent is to take the SOS Festival to other coastal cities, beyond Cape Town and Durban, in coming years. This aligns with GreenMatter's implementation goals and growing national partner base. Key strategic partners and sponsors for 2013 are the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA), the Hans HoHeisen Charitable Trust (HHCT), Iziko Museums of South Africa, and GreenMatter.

"The SOS Festival has proven to be an expanding platform for a range of organisations to showcase marine conservation efforts and communicate key messages to a wider public. We are very excited at the involvement this year of another of our partners, GreenMatter, thereby highlighting the important issue of the skills needed to effectively conserve and manage our ecosystems," says Anthony Nicklin, representative of Nedbank Private Wealth, whom manage The Hans Hoheisen Charitable Trust.

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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: Lewis House, 239 Barkston Drive, Blairgowrie, P.O. Box 515, Randburg, Johannesburg, South Africa, Tel. +27-11-7891122, Fax. +27-11-7895188, e-mail address: info@birdlife.org.za, website: www.birdlife.org.za. The SOS Festival web address is www.sosfestival.co.za