

MEDIA RELEASE

Embargo: Immediate

“BirdLife South Africa’s Important Bird Areas Programme – now accessible to everyone”

Johannesburg, 19 July 2010: BirdLife South Africa has launched its interactive, ‘one-stop-shop’ website for Important Bird Areas (IBA), giving people access to maps, information, bird lists and resources about South Africa’s 122 IBAs. Visitors can also register as IBA supporters and thus become involved in assessing, monitoring and conserving the IBAs they are passionate about. This high-tech, but easy to use, website brings the IBA Programme that much closer to the network of birders, bird clubs, universities, government departments and conservation organisations who will play a role in conserving South Africa’s most important bird habitats. The website address is: http://www.birdlife.org.za/page/30/important_bird_areas

The Important Bird Areas (IBA) Programme is an international-driven programme which identifies, monitors and protects sites which are important for the long-term future of our birds.

BirdLife South Africa’s IBA Programme has progressed in leaps and bounds since it was re-launched in 2009, and is fast becoming one of the cornerstones in BirdLife South Africa’s endeavours to conserve South Africa’s 841 bird species and their habitats. The success of this project will result in the conservation of the most threatened birds and habitats, and it will be done through one of the largest conservation networks in South Africa, i.e. dedicated bird-watchers, communities, bird clubs, universities, government departments, and conservation organisations.

For this to work, it means that the IBA Programme must be accessible to everyone, and so BirdLife South Africa is proud to launch its interactive IBA website. This is a one-stop-shop for anyone interested in IBAs and provides people with everything they need to know about the IBA Programme and their local IBAs.

The interactive Google Earth map allows people to zoom in on a specific IBA and download information about the site, as well as obtain an up-to-date bird list for that IBA. The bird list is updated every five minutes, as new information is submitted to the Animal Demography Unit from the Southern African Bird Atlas Project 2 contributors. The site also allows one to actively contribute to the conservation of one or more IBAs; by, for example, registering as an IBA assessor or by becoming involved in bird monitoring at the site.

“The IBA Programme depends on dedicated people, especially volunteers, who have a passion to conserve South Africa’s biodiversity. The IBA Programme provides an opportunity for people and organisations to become involved in hands-on conservation. Contact details and other information can be provided directly to BirdLife South Africa via the website” says Ernst Retief, BirdLife South Africa’s IBA Data Manager.

The 122 IBAs cover an area of more than 10 million hectares and conserve most of South Africa's bird species, of which 125 are listed in the South African Red Data Book. Many of these IBAs are threatened by mining, agriculture, urbanization and a host of other factors. The conservation of these sites will only succeed if it has the support of a national network of concerned citizens, institutions and other partners.

"BirdLife South Africa's want to ensure that the IBA Programme becomes an integral part of national conservation planning, ultimately ensuring that our country's birds and their habitats are conserved" says Daniel Marnewick, BirdLife South Africa's IBA Manager.

Visit the IBA website today at www.birdlife.org.za (by clicking on 'Conservation')

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For further information, please contact: Daniel Marnewick, +27 (0)11 789 1122, +27 (0)82 772 4432, iba@birdlife.org.za

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
3. Website address: http://www.birdlife.org.za/page/30/important_bird_areas
4. Map address: <http://www.birdingroutes.co.za/iba/iba.html>
5. Contact form: <http://www.birdingroutes.co.za/iba/contact.html>
6. SABAP2 project: <http://adu.org.za>