



MEDIA RELEASE

Embargo: immediate

Knysna Toyota drives bird conservation

Johannesburg, 29 August 2012: BirdLife South Africa has received a very generous sponsorship of two Toyota Hilux single cab vehicles from Knysna Toyota. The vehicles are helping to drive two headline bird conservation programmes at BirdLife South Africa; namely seabird conservation and conserving Important Bird Areas (IBA) in the Western and Eastern Cape. The vehicles are a fantastic addition to these work programmes, where travelling over vast areas and transporting important cargo is at the centre of their work. This is also the start of a potentially long standing partnership between Knysna Toyota and BirdLife South Africa.

Dale Wright is the Western Cape Regional Conservation Manager for BirdLife South Africa's IBA Programme. He spends much time crossing rugged terrain to assess the 24 IBAs across the Western Cape, as well as a few in the Eastern Cape. These IBAs include beautiful wilderness areas and much of the Cape Fold Belt Mountains. Dale's new Toyota Hilux is now his trustworthy travel companion helping get him to the most important sites for conserving the many special fynbos and forest birds across the Western Cape.

Dale has prioritised the region's IBAs for urgent conservation intervention. Through partnerships with private land owners, government and other NGOs, he will be using innovative conservation tools and programmes, such as the Biodiversity Stewardship Programme and Biosphere Reserves, to ensure long-term protection for these critical sites. Dale also works closely with local communities and bird clubs to establish local conservation groups, who are the heart and soul of conservation at site level.

Seabirds are the most threatened group of birds in the world, and the Seabird Division at BirdLife South Africa is at the forefront, globally, of addressing the many issues affecting seabirds. The Albatross Task Force (the flagship programme of the Save the Albatross Campaign, initiated by BirdLife International) is a team of dedicated instructors based in South Africa, Namibia and six South American countries. The South African team has achieved international acclaim for its work. The vehicle will replace hired bakkies that the team used previously to take their bulky research gear to fishing vessels. They conduct scientific experiments to refine existing and devise new techniques to avoid seabird deaths without impacting fishing practicality and profitability. When seabirds that get caught and drowned during longline fishing for tuna, their carcasses are returned to Cape Town. The seabird team works with Prof. Peter Ryan of the University of Cape Town to identify the species, age, measure, determine sex and other data from the seabirds. The sponsored vehicle from Knysna Toyota means that no longer does this grim cargo have to be transported in the boots of their personal vehicles.

Another major seabird conservation programme focuses on saving the embattled African Penguin. The Penguin population has crashed in recent years, prompting BirdLife International to uplist the species' threat status to 'Endangered'. With projects

running at Dassen Island in the Western Cape, and at Bird Island in the Eastern Cape, the team has some big distances to travel and the bakkie will make the trips that much more pleasurable!

“We would like to extend our thanks and appreciation to Tom Esterhuizen of Knysna Toyota for his generous contribution to the conservation work of these two programmes. We look forward to working together in the coming years”, commented Mark Anderson, Chief Executive Officer of BirdLife South Africa.

End

For further information, please contact: Bronwyn Maree, +27 (0)21 419 7347 (office), +27 (0)82 364 9281 (mobile) or email: albatross@birdlife.org.za for queries relating to the Albatross Task Force and Dale Wright +27 (0)72 562 3946 or email: westerncape@birdlife.org.za. Tom Esterhuizen from Knysna Toyota, +27 (44) 382 1122, email: tom@knysnatoyota.co.za or visit www.knysnatoyota.co.za.

Notes for the editor:

1. The South African Albatross Task Force (ATF) is part of an international team working with fishermen and government to find innovative solutions to seabird bycatch.
2. Longline vessels targeting tunas set extremely long lines with thousands of branched lines with hook attached. Seabirds, especially albatrosses and petrels, are attracted to the baited hooks. If they get hooked while scavenging baits, they get pulled under as the longline sinks to the fishing depth, and drown. BirdLife International estimates that each year 100,000 albatrosses alone are killed in this way.
3. Trawl vessels, targeting hake, set a net held by two large cables which is dragged along the ocean floor. The vessel has an onboard factory which discards unwanted fish waste such as the heads and guts. Birds are attracted to this and with their large wingspan (up to 3.5m) accidentally become entangled around the cables. Occasionally birds become entangled in the net meshes.
4. The most widely used technique to avoid seabird bycatch is the “tori line” or bird scaring line, invented by a Japanese longline captain. Use of bird scaring lines is mandatory in South Africa, as is setting at night when most seabirds don't forage.
5. More info on the work of the ATF can be found on www.savethealbatross.net, and on the Seabird Division on www.birdlife.org.za
6. Important Bird Areas are sites known to hold bird species of conservation importance, including threatened species, biome restricted species, restricted range species and congregatory species.
7. The mission of BirdLife South Africa is to promote the enjoyment, conservation, study and understanding of wild birds and their habitats.
8. 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
9. BirdLife International is a global alliance of conservation organisations working in more than 115 countries and territories that, together, to promote sustainable living as a means to conserve biodiversity