



## MEDIA RELEASE

**Embargo: Immediate**

### **Sending out an SOS for National Marine Week**

**Cape Town, 27 September 2012:** Seabirds are the most threatened group of birds in the world, with almost one third of all seabird species threatened with extinction. Most of the majestic albatross species that roam the Southern Ocean have rapidly declining populations and closer to home our iconic African Penguin is now classified as *Endangered*. The annual Save Our Seabirds (SOS) Festival aims to raise awareness about the plight of seabirds and celebrate the beauty of marine life.

BirdLife South Africa has held the SOS Festival for the last 4 years to raise awareness about broad marine conservation issues. “The Save Our Seabirds Festival is a National Marine Week initiative from BirdLife South Africa’s Seabird Division, in partnership with the Department of Environmental Affairs and Iziko Museums, with significant support this year from The Hans Hoheisen Charitable Trust (managed by BOE Private Clients). It will run from 8-14 October 2012,” says Dr Ross Wanless, manager of the Seabird Division. The SOS Festival aims to educate people about the threats to our oceans and marine biodiversity, while inspiring the public to help make a difference.

This year the focus for National Marine Week and the SOS Festival is the Southern Ocean. The Southern Ocean plays a role in regulating the Earth’s climate and many of the effects of climate change will be seen there first. The South African government has recently purchased the SA Agulhas II, an icebreaking polar supply ship, to conduct research in the Southern Oceans and sub-Antarctic Islands. These include the Prince Edward Islands, South Africa’s southernmost territory and an important seabird breeding site. The South African and French governments are working together to protect the waters around the Prince Edward Islands and the French-owned Crozet Islands, to create a Marine Protected Area (MPA). This MPA will strengthen marine conservation in the region and support sustainable fishing for Patagonian toothfish.

“The SOS Festival is an opportunity to bring the amazing conservation work that many organisations do into the public eye during National Marine Week. Iziko South African Museum has a week of activities planned at the museum, highlighting the impacts of human activities on the oceans. They also host the annual “Oceans of Life” photographic exhibition, hosted in association with Orms Pro Photo Warehouse and the Natural History Unit. Canon South Africa, Oryx Worldwide Photographic Expeditions and One Ocean Expeditions have sponsored amazing prizes this year.

The Marine Conservation Lecture Series hosted at Iziko South African Museum will include talks by Peter Chadwick, of WWF-SA, Venessa Strauss, CEO of the seabird

rehabilitation centre SANCCOB, and an international guest speaker and best-selling author, Hadoram Shirihai. The SOS Festival runs concurrent with the annual Simon's Town Penguin Festival, which is on Saturday 13 October" says Dr Wanless.

SANCCOB and the South African Environmental Observer Network will be running school environmental education work that integrates marine conservation messages into the school curricular activities and learning

BirdLife South Africa has also formed partnerships with Khoisan Salt and Knysna Toyota, and these partnerships will be showcased at the evening lectures. This year, BirdLife South Africa has also formed an exciting partnership with the local band Freshlyground, who will be performing on Saturday 13 October at the V&A Waterfront. "There will be a limited number of tickets for sale. Booking opens on 1 October so be sure to book on time to avoid disappointment!" says Vernon Head, Chairperson of BirdLife South Africa. "For the birdwatchers, we will again have two birding tours to Robben Island in search of the elusive Chukar Partridge and the only "tickable" feral population of peacocks" adds Vernon Head.

**End**

**For further information**, please visit our website at [www.sosfestival.co.za](http://www.sosfestival.co.za) or contact Christina Moseley on 021-4197347 or email [christina.moseley@birdlife.org.za](mailto:christina.moseley@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](mailto:info@birdlife.org.za), website: [www.birdlife.org.za](http://www.birdlife.org.za)
3. BirdLife South Africa's Seabird Division: consists of five staff working on seabird conservation. Work is conducted nationally (Albatross Task Force and African Penguin work), regionally (Marine Important Bird Areas programme and globally (Regional Fisheries Management Organisations).
4. The South African Albatross Task Force is part of an international team working with fishermen and government to find innovative solutions to seabird bycatch.
5. Three species of albatross are *Critically Endangered* on the International Red List. This is the highest threat category before extinction.
6. SOS – Save Our Seabirds
7. 'Oceans of Life Photographic Competition' – a public call for photographic entries relating to the marine environment was made. The top 50 outstanding photographs will be chosen and exhibited with the winning photograph winning a trip for two to Antarctica, courtesy of Oyrx Worldwide Photographic Expeditions and One Ocean Expeditions. The Youth prize is a Canon camera and lens.
8. Entrance for the evening lecturers free (although booking is essential). Monday evening (8 October) features lecture by Peter Chadwick, manager of the WWF Honda Marine Parks Programme and winner of the 2011 Veolia Wildlife Photographer of the Year competition. He will be talking about *Marine Protected Areas: critical life support system, necessary evil or waste of time and money?* On Wednesday 10 October, Venessa Strauss, CEO of SANCCOB, will give a talk entitled *The 'most remote' oiled wildlife response operation - lessons learnt on Tristan da Cunha*. The Friday lecture will be given by world-renowned seabird expert and author of the international best-seller 'Guide to Antarctic Wildlife', Hadoram Shirihai, on his rediscovery of three seabird species all previously thought to be extinct.