



MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate use

Support our Secretarybirds this Secretary's Day

Johannesburg, 26 August 2014:

Secretarybirds are ambassadors of the African veldt and in need of our protection. Since 2011 BirdLife South Africa has gathered valuable information about these birds' movements and behaviour. Wednesday, 3 September 2014, is Secretary's Day. Honour you secretary by making a contribution to a Secretary of a different feather.

In 2011 BirdLife South Africa launched a project to study the Secretarybird. The research project was initiated in the same year that the threatened status of the Secretarybird was changed to globally Vulnerable. In the past three years we have gained a better understanding of the biology and conservation of the Secretarybird, including the vast distances they travel after leaving the nest and the numerous and significant threats they face.

The aim of our study is to determine the species' preferred habitat, the dispersal patterns of juveniles, and to identify the threats responsible for the apparent high mortality rate of Secretarybirds.

BirdLife South Africa has fitted tracking devices to eight Secretarybirds and, even though the project is still in the data collection phase, valuable discoveries have already been made. Juvenile Secretarybirds move extraordinary distances after they leave their nests. For instance, *BLiNG*, a bird sponsored by BirdLife Northern Gauteng, was fitted with a tracking device at the Sondela Nature Reserve near Bela-Bela in the Limpopo Province. Within weeks of leaving his natal area he moved more than 520 km, measured in a direct line, to the Makgadigadi Pans in Botswana. Taemane, sponsored by De Beers, was fitted with a tracking device on a farm near Warden and moved 341 km to the south coast of KwaZulu-Natal. Archer and Strider, sibling Secretarybirds fitted with tracking devices near Calvinia, both moved to the far Northern Cape before moving to Darling, in the Western Cape, and Lesotho, respectively. It is interesting to note that both *BLiNG* and Taemane have since returned to their natal areas. Time will tell if all juvenile birds follow the same pattern.

In addition to the above, BirdLife South Africa is funding a research project, being undertaken by Eleen Strydom, a B-Tech - Nature Conservation Student at Tshwane University of Technology, on the nesting productivity and diet of Secretarybirds in the greater Wakkerstroom area. BirdLife South Africa has also initiated a project to determine the impact of fences on birds. This was done after a number of records were received of Secretarybirds that died after colliding or after becoming entangled in fences.

For more information and maps on these projects and the birds we are tracking, see <http://www.birdlife.org.za/conservation/threatened-species/secretarybird>, or follow the project on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/secretarybirdconservation>.

The sophisticated technology used to track these birds is giving us valuable insights into the lives of Secretarybirds. Downloading the data from eight different tracking devices is however expensive, and for this we need your help.

If you make a donation towards this cause, you will help to gather invaluable information which will help us to conserve the Secretarybird. All donations are welcome, but if you donate R500 or more we will not only send a special e-card to your secretary on Secretary's Day, but also include you in our mailing list for all future updates on the project.

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For further information, please contact:

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To make a contribution towards the Secretarybird project, please contact Linda van den Heever at linda.vdheever@birdlife.org.za or +27 (11) 789 1122.

Notes to Editors:

- This work would not be possible without the support of the BirdLife International Preventing Extinctions Programme through funding from the two national Species Champions, Petra Diamonds and Airports Company South Africa. Read more on the BirdLife International Preventing Extinctions Programme at <http://www.birdlife.org/extinction/> and <http://www.birdlife.org.za/conservation/threatened-species>

About Birdlife South Africa

- The vision of BirdLife South Africa is to promote the conservation, research, understanding, observation of and enjoyment of natural birds, and their habitats.
- Birds are important environmental indicators, the proverbial “canaries in the coal mine”. By focusing on birds, and the sites and the habitats on which they depend, BirdLife South Africa aims to improve the quality of life for birds, for other wildlife and ultimately for people.
- BirdLife South Africa is the largest non-profit bird conservation organization in the country. It relies on donor funding and financial support from the public to carry out its critical conservation work.
- For more information, visit www.birdlife.org.za