



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **International honours for South African marine conservationist**

**Cape Town, 21 January 2014:** The Future for Nature Award 2014, an international, competitive award for young conservationists, has been won by South African Bronwyn Maree. Mrs Maree leads the acclaimed Albatross Task Force of BirdLife South Africa, undertaking work to prevent unnecessary deaths of seabirds during fishing operations. She is one of three winners, chosen from a total of 126 applications from 58 countries. In addition to international recognition, this award carries a purse of €50 000 for each winner.

Over half of all the seabird species in the family that includes albatrosses are decreasing and threatened with extinction. The overriding threat to these graceful ocean wanderers is the accidental, yet deadly, interaction with longline and trawl fisheries. To address this global threat, in 2005 the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and BirdLife International established the Albatross Task Force (ATF) as the world's first international team of mitigation instructors working directly with fishermen to demonstrate best practice measures to reduce seabird bycatch. The ATF is active in nine countries, filling a critical gap in translating knowledge and regulations to prevent seabird bycatch into direct action onboard vessels.

Mrs Maree joined the ATF team in 2008, her first job after graduating with a Masters in fisheries science from Rhodes University. She is one of the longest-serving ATF team members, and until recently was the only female instructor in a heavily male-dominated industry. She has been instrumental in leading her team to achieve significant results in albatross conservation onboard local trawl and longline fishing vessels, which are of global significance. Since implementing ATF-recommended measures, seabird mortalities have decreased by >80% in these fleets, resulting in tens of thousands of threatened seabirds being saved each year. "Critically, the solutions that we advocate to fishing companies and crews are cheap, simple and don't affect fish catches – the perfect win-win outcome" said Mrs Maree.

The Future for Nature (FFN) Foundation has recognised the role Mrs Maree has played over the last 6 years in conserving these ocean wanderers. Through this annual award, FFN

supports young, talented and ambitious conservations working to protect endangered species. The Future for Nature Award encourages individuals to become conservation leaders and opens doors to an international network of dedicated conservationists who are able to provide learning support, mentoring and financial assistance. This prestigious international award highlights individuals who can be seen as role models who can pass on their passion and love of nature conservation to other young people, while stimulating the individual to continue their outstanding efforts in protecting endangered species. The prize money will be used to test new devices for eliminating seabird bycatch in tuna longline fishing. One of the devices, called a Hook Pod, has already been trialled successfully by the ATF team in South Africa. "A new round of trials is being planned for this year, with government and industries approval and support. This award comes at the perfect time," continued Mrs Maree.

Mark Anderson, CEO of BirdLife South Africa, said "It will be a great privilege for Bronwyn to accept this award later this year in the Netherlands. She has lead her team with passion, enthusiasm and professionalism, and their successes, and Bronwyn's leadership, have been recognised in this way". This award will go a long way towards ensuring that the world will never be without albatrosses!

**For further information, please contact:**

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Photos of Bronwyn Maree are available from Dr Wanless.

**Notes to Editors:**

- The vision of BirdLife South Africa is to promote the conservation, research, understanding, observation and enjoyment of natural birds and their habitats.
- BirdLife South Africa is the largest non-profit bird conservation organisation in the country, and relies on donor funding and financial support from the public to carry out its critical conservation work.
- The Albatross Task Force was established in 2005 by The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and BirdLife International.
- Albatross Task Force teams are based in the bycatch 'hotspots' of southern Africa and South America, where albatrosses come into contact with large and diverse longline and trawl fishing fleets.
- For more information, visit on BirdLife South Africa visit [www.birdlife.org.za](http://www.birdlife.org.za) or for the Albatross Task Force visit <http://www.rspb.org.uk/supporting/campaigns/albatross/>
- The goal of the Future for Nature Foundation is the protection of species of wild animals and plants and the conservation of nature in general. Future for Nature aims to stimulate a new generation of nature conservation leaders by providing support to young, highly committed and talented conservationists.
- Bronwyn Maree was a top ten finalist in the Future for Nature 2013 Award.
- Read more on the Future for Nature Foundation at <http://www.futurefornature.org>