



MEDIA RELEASE

Embargo: Immediate

Prince Edward Islands MPA applauded

Cape Town, 9 April 2013 – The protection of the oceans and marine biodiversity is one of the greatest challenges and opportunities facing humanity. Not only do the oceans provide irreplaceable protein for human consumption, but they are a critical link in efforts to minimise global climate change. Protecting the oceans is uniquely difficult because large parts of the ocean are beyond national jurisdiction, also known as the high seas, where all nations are able to use and exploit.

Using Marine Protected Areas (MPA) is a core strategy that national governments can employ for protecting the oceans and ensuring sustainable use within territorial waters. BirdLife South Africa applauds the Department of Environmental Affairs for today's announcement that South Africa's subAntarctic territory, the Prince Edward Islands, has had an enormous MPA declared. BirdLife South Africa congratulates both departmental officials, independent scientists and others who were involved in the work to define and declare this MPA.

The islands are internationally renowned for their important seabird colonies, including holding nearly half of the global population of Wandering Albatrosses (*Diomedea exulans*), 13% of the world's King Penguins (*Aptenodytes patagonicus*), and one of the highest numbers of breeding seabird species (26) of any island in the world. BirdLife International lists the islands as an Important Bird Area in recognition of its irreplaceable biodiversity value. BirdLife is also working at identifying marine Important Bird Areas across the world's oceans, and the new MPA overlaps with several proposed marine IBAs. The establishment of the multi-zoned MPA will afford protection for many of the breeding seabirds (and other marine life). For example, the establishment of a 12 nm no-take zone around both islands will help to ensure that seabird species such as Gentoo Penguins (*Pygoscelis papua*) and Crozet Shag (*Phalacrocorax melanogenis*), which feed exclusively within this area and which have suffered large decreases in recent times, will not face additional pressures from new activities in their feeding ranges.

Dr Ross Wanless, Seabird Division Manager at BirdLife South Africa, commented "This declaration represents the culmination of a lot of work by many dedicated scientists and conservationists over many years. Marine Protected Areas have great potential to protect seabirds and other marine biodiversity, and the scale and nature of the Prince Edward Islands MPA is impressive. I do not doubt that it will benefit all marine life in the area, especially if the restrictions on fishing, which can cause significant seabird mortality, can be enforced."

End

For further information please contact Dr Ross Wanless on 021 419 7347 or email ross.wanless@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. 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. For more information on marine Important Bird Areas, please visit BirdLife International's e-Atlas at <http://54.247.127.44/marineIBAs/default.html>