



MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate use

Secretarybirds need your assistance

Johannesburg, 22 August 2013:

It may no longer be politically correct to call your assistant a 'secretary', and while we may not be able to rename them 'Assistantbirds or PA-birds', we can certainly save our avian Secretarybirds from looming extinction! A token gift for your assistant on Secretary's Day, Wednesday 4 September 2013, could mean a great deal for Secretarybird conservation.

In 2011 BirdLife South Africa launched a scientific project to study the Secretarybird, of which the threatened status was changed to globally Vulnerable in the same year. Since then we have gained a better understanding of the vast distances these birds disperse after they fledge, as well as the significant threats they face.

The aim of our study is to determine the preferred habitat of Secretarybirds and dispersal patterns of juveniles, as well as to identify the threats responsible for the high mortality recorded in Secretarybirds. Since the start of the project, we have tracked three Secretarybirds. Our results, based on these three birds, indicate that the young birds tend to stay around their nest site for a short while before dispersing to an area far away.

One of the Secretarybirds, named BLiNG, was fitted with a tracking device earlier this year and it astonished us all when it travelled more than 175 km in one day! It took off from the nest site in Limpopo and settled a few days later about 80 km south of the Makgadigadi pans in Botswana.

The second bird, called Taemane, moved all the way from Warden to the KwaZulu-Natal south coast before moving inland again. It seems to have settled in the vicinity of Ixopo, but time will tell if this will be permanent or whether it will move further.

For more information and maps about BLiNG and Taemane's movements, see <http://www.birdlife.org.za/conservation/threatened-species/secretarybird>.

BLiNG and Taemane are doing some interesting things, one heading for the desert and the other for the beach. We'd like to track the movements of more Secretarybirds, so that we can determine whether other birds have similarly interesting movement patterns.

The sophisticated tracking devices are however quite costly, with a single device costing in the region of R15 000. Apart from the devices, many other costs, such as getting to remote places to fit the devices to Secretarybird nestlings, also need to be covered. We need your support to help us further our study and ultimately conserve the Secretarybird.

We'd like to encourage bosses to rather support Secretarybirds on Secretary's Day, and thus not give gifts of chocolates or to their secretaries or PAs. This gift to conservation will be used for the Secretarybird tracking project.

If you donate R500 towards this cause, you will help to gather invaluable information which will help us conserve the Secretarybird. For your donation, you will receive an elegant card for your secretary, as well as updates on the movements of the birds you are sponsoring. It may also be exciting for you and your staff to predict where your Secretarybird(s) will travel.

Help us to save our Secretarybirds today. There will be no Assistantbirds to take their place in the future.

Donation forms can be downloaded at <http://www.birdlife.org.za/support-us/secretarys-day>

Ends

For further information, please contact:

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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