



## MEDIA RELEASE

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### World Penguin Day

**Cape Town, 25 April 2013** – Penguins have captured the world’s imagination, with their comical waddle, beautiful plumage and almost human-like qualities. World Penguin Day happens on 25 April every year to raise awareness about this remarkable group of birds.

World Penguin Day was started at the McMurdo Station in Antarctica after scientists noticed a strange phenomenon. Every year, like clockwork, on 25 April a colony of Adélie Penguins would return from sea to breed. Now the day is used to educate people and raise awareness about all species of penguins. “Penguins may be one of the most popular groups of birds in the world, but despite their popularity, in part due to movies such as *Happy Feet* and *Madagascar*, many people do not realise that of the 18 species of penguins, 11 of them are on the Red List of Threatened Species” says Dr Ross Wanless, Manager of the Seabird Division of BirdLife South Africa.

Many species of penguin will be affected by climate change, but it is not just those species such as the magnificent Emperor Penguin which live in the Antarctic that will be threatened. Climate change will affect sea surface temperatures, the abundance and distribution of food as well as the frequency of the occurrence of events such as El Niño, which will affect all penguin species even those at the equator such as the Galapagos Penguin. Other threats to penguins include the introduction of predators to breeding island, disturbance by tourists and researchers at breeding colonies and commercial fishing. “This World Penguin Day, everyone can play a role in saving penguins by encouraging world leaders to create two Antarctic reserves that will protect penguin feeding areas from being exploited by large-scale commercial fishing.” Dr Wanless urges.

It is not just the penguins that live in the cold waters of Antarctica that need saving. There are several penguin species that never see snow, one of these species is the iconic African Penguin. Found nowhere else but in South Africa and Namibia, the African Penguin is one of the five endangered penguin species in the world.

“South Africa has lost more than 60% of its penguins in the last 10 years.” says Dr Ross Wanless. “And the decrease is projected to continue, unless something is done”. The main threats to the African Penguin are a lack of food around breeding colonies, the constant potential for large oil spills and predation by Cape Fur Seals. BirdLife South Africa is focusing its work on the lack of food by working with the government and sardine and anchovy fishery to stop fishing around breeding colonies as well as doing research into other ways to increase food security for the penguins.

“Members of the public can help our very own African Penguin, by supporting BirdLife South Africa’s work through donating to the Save our Seabird Fund and purchasing a penguin awareness bracelet” says Christina Moseley, the Coastal Seabird Conservation Manager at BirdLife South Africa. “Celebrate World Penguin Day by taking the time to learn something about penguins and what you can do to help them both at home and around the world”.

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**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. The Red List of Threatened Species is compiled by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and is an inventory of the conservation status and extinction risk of species. <http://www.iucnredlist.org>
4. There is a petition run by The Pew Charitable Trusts, urging member states Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources to create two Antarctic marine reserves. It can be found at <https://secure3.convio.net/pew/site/Advocacy?cmd=display&page=UserAction&id=1692>
5. Penguin awareness bracelets are made by people in disadvantaged communities. Proceeds from the sale of the bracelets go to the Save Our Seabirds Fund, which supports penguin conservation as well as towards fighting HIV/Aids by providing medical care, social support and skills development. Bracelets can be purchased by contacting Christina Moseley ([christina.moseley@birdlife.org.za](mailto:christina.moseley@birdlife.org.za) or +27 21 419 7347)