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Learn about the wetland wonderlands

Flufftail Festival focuses on these ecosystems, crucial to bird species

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YOU CAN now do your shopping, enjoy a meal and learn about the importance of preserving the environment – all in one place.

This is at the annual Flufftail Festival, which starts today and runs until Monday at the Maponya Mall in Soweto.

The event, which is a collaboration between BirdLife SA, Eskom, the Department of Environmental Affairs and Rand Water, will educate young and old about our local habitat.

BirdLife spokesperson Linda van den Heever said the aim of the festival was to raise awareness about threatened habitats such as wetlands; endangered birds, especially White-winged Flufftails; and saving water.

She stressed the importance of preserving water. "With the drought still gripping many parts of the country, there's no better time to be raising awareness about water."

Van den Heever emphasised the importance of caring for wetlands, which she said are essential ecosystems that have multiple functions.

"From cleaning water and providing a medium for recreational activities, to providing homes for White-winged Flufftails and other animals, wetlands are truly wonderlands."

This year's Flufftail Festival, which coincides with World Wetlands Day on Thursday, also has a fun set-up.

"It takes the form of a giant maze as well as a puppet show,

presented by the Rare Finch Conservation Group," said Van den Heever.

She explained that families are encouraged to collect an entry form and wander through the maze, stopping at five different stations to answer questions.

Each correctly completed entry will stand a chance to win one of the many prizes on offer.

The interactive puppet show will be another feature of the festival, which starts at 9am daily in the Ster-Kinekor theatre.

"Schools, with the endorsement of the Department of Education, will also be visiting on weekdays," said Van den Heever.

Young audiences will also learn the importance of preserving the White-winged Flufftails.

"Waxi the Hero takes young audiences on an exciting adventure as he and Wandu the wattled crane solicit the help of their feathered friends to find Fluffy the Flufftail, who hasn't been seen in ages," she said.

Those who visit the festival this weekend can also take their memories home after having their photos taken in a makeshift wetland while wearing various props, such as gumboots and binoculars.

"They will receive these images, hard copies as well as electronic copies, for free," Van den Heever added.

Participants will also receive a sticker and an informative brochure.