



## MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

### **The Moutonshoek community protect their land to conserve our natural heritage and the water catchment for Verlorenvlei estuary**

Cape Town, 23 April 2018

The Moutonshoek Protected Environment (MPE) is South Africa's newest privately protected area, nestled in the mountains of the Moutonshoek valley, near Piketberg on South Africa's west coast. The MPE was established through the work of BirdLife South Africa's Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBA) Programme, with support from CapeNature. This declaration of 9 000 hectares has helped achieve a major milestone for BirdLife South Africa, bringing the total hectares that the IBA Programme has helped declare as protected areas to 100 000 hectares.

The project not only facilitated the declaration of the Moutonshoek Protected Environment, but also assisted with the establishment of the 12 000 hectare Verlorenvlei Conservancy, which brings together landowners around the Verlorenvlei estuary committed to improving the environmental management of this critical site. The Verlorenvlei Protected Areas Project also facilitated the training of more than 40 local community members working on environmental management projects in the area, thereby helping to enhance their socio-economic situation, whilst simultaneously contributing to the conservation of South Africa's natural resources.

These positive conservation outcomes were made possible by the willing and supportive private landowners in the Moutonshoek Valley. They are the real conservation heroes, ensuring their land is protected and managed sustainably into the future.

The Moutonshoek Protected Environment comprises an area of integrated land-use, where agricultural production and biodiversity conservation coexist side by side. The site protects the Krom Antonies River and its catchment, which acts as the main tributary of the Verlorenvlei wetland system. The Verlorenvlei Estuary is listed as an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA), Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) and a Ramsar site. The future of the Verlorenvlei Estuary and its biodiversity is dependent on the health of this upper water catchment.

The Moutonshoek valley also provides a safe haven for a variety of species, including the Endangered and endemic *Diascia caitliniae* flower and the Endangered Verlorenvlei Redfin fish (*Pseudobarbus verloreni*), both of which occur nowhere else in the world. The site is also important for the Vulnerable Cape Leopard (*Panthera pardus*) and threatened birds species such as the Endangered Blue Crane (*Anthropoides paradiseus*), African Marsh Harrier (*Circus ranivorus*) and Black Harrier (*Circus maurus*). The MPE forms part of the

Sandveld Corridor within the Greater Cederberg Biodiversity Corridor, a landscape initiative designed to connect protected areas and ensure sound environmental management.

All protected areas require a management plan, and the MPE's management plan includes habitat management activities such as alien vegetation removal, fire control and appropriate burning, as well as river and wetland rehabilitation. However whilst still allowing residents to continue with their economic activities of growing food and promoting ecotourism in the region.

A "protected environment" is a category of protected area declared under the National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act (NEMPAA, 2003), which, after a nature reserve, offers the next most secure form of protection. The declaration of protected areas on privately owned land is facilitated through the innovative national biodiversity stewardship programme. Biodiversity stewardship allows for the expansion of our protected area estate through ground-breaking legislation and multi-stakeholder partnerships.

These declarations require the support of CapeNature, which is facilitated through their long standing partnership with BirdLife South Africa. The Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa was another integral partner on this project.

The Verlorenvlei Protected Areas Project was funded by the WWF Nedbank Green Trust.

## **QUOTES**

### **Mark Anderson, CEO for BirdLife South Africa:**

"South Africa's rich diversity of 847 bird species relies on the successful conservation of our 112 Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs). This is, in part dependent on achieving legal protection for priority IBAs, and can be accomplished using innovative mechanisms such as biodiversity stewardship, and through strategic partnerships between NGOs, government and landowners."

### **Garth Mortimer, Senior Manager: Protected Areas Programme, CapeNature:**

"CapeNature is responsible for delivering on targets as set out in an approved Western Cape Protected Area Expansion Strategy, which are both ambitious and numerous, that speaks to increasing the size of the protected area network and improving the legal status of the network. In order to unlock the potential for private land conservation in the Western Cape, CapeNature has adopted a partnership approach to augment its capacity and resources in the province towards implementing the strategy. To this effect CapeNature and BirdLife South Africa have entered into a Memorandum of Understanding.

BirdLife South Africa is currently working in partnership with CapeNature and other organisations to improve the formal protection and conservation of Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas including certain Western Cape estuaries. CapeNature would like to congratulate BirdLife South Africa on the successful establishment and declaration of the Moutonshoek Protected Environment and express gratitude for its ongoing commitment to supporting the conservation of important habitats and ecosystems in the Western Cape."

**Jan Coetzee, Manager: Land Programme, WWF-SA:**

“WWF-SA’s Land Programme supports current efforts in the establishment, expansion, consolidation and management of protected areas in South Africa. The programme focuses mainly on acquiring land through land purchase, facilitation of donations of land and funds, and innovative mechanisms for securing biodiversity, such as biodiversity stewardship. Also, the programme continues to support the strengthening of capacity within provincial conservation agencies and processes to develop and implement key conservation policies.

Through the support of the WWF Nedbank Green Trust, BirdLife South Africa has been able to secure the protection and sustainable management of the Moutonshoek catchment and Verlorenvlei Estuary. This project has successfully engaged landowners and other stakeholders in the area, and thus has ensured the continued support of the initiative. The Land Programme would also like to congratulate BirdLife South Africa on this important achievement in this critical biodiversity area.

The Land Programme values this partnership with BirdLife South Africa, and will continue to support this project and other landscape initiatives in biodiversity priority areas.”

**ENDS**

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**About BirdLife South Africa**

- BirdLife South Africa is the local country partner of BirdLife International. BirdLife International is the world’s largest nature conservation Partnership with more than 120 BirdLife Partners worldwide and almost 11 million supporters.
- 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.
- Vision. BirdLife South Africa wishes to see a country and region where nature and people live in greater harmony, more equitably and sustainably.
- Mission. BirdLife South Africa strives to conserve birds, their habitats and biodiversity through scientifically-based programmes, through supporting the sustainable and equitable use of natural resources and through encouraging people to enjoy and value nature.
- 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’s IBA Programme aims to improve the quality of life for birds, for other wildlife, and ultimately for people.
- For more information, visit [www.birdlife.org.za](http://www.birdlife.org.za)

