

MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

Cape Town, 24 May 2019

Title: Whilst nature plummets around the globe, South Africa's Conservation Areas act to slow the loss of biodiversity.

Sub-title: South Africa's diverse suite of novel Conservation Areas are ensuring the protection of our natural heritage, whilst also promoting inclusivity in conservation and providing a range of social and economic benefits.

Main text:

Recent international reports have illustrated the rapid rate at which we're losing our biodiversity. Area-based conservation efforts to stem this decline rely on increasing the global network of both protected areas and conservation areas in order to conserve biodiversity, improve land management and provide various socio-economic benefits. This task has traditionally fallen solely on governments; however, the enormity of the task requires support, and recent research has indicated a shift towards more diverse forms of governance and ownership.

BirdLife South Africa, with funding from the Table Mountain Fund, undertook a project aimed at enhancing the role of Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) in area-based conservation. South Africa is blessed with a diverse suite of models which allow communal and private landowners to protect the biodiversity on their properties, whilst receiving certain benefits in return. The so-called Biodiversity Stewardship Initiative is considered to be a global leader in private and communal land conservation.

From this work BirdLife South Africa produced two reports which aim to further enhance conservation. The first of these details the challenges and opportunities for organisations in the sector, and specifically looked at ways to enhance government and NGO collaboration. Dale Wright, BirdLife South Africa's Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs) – Conservation Implementation Manager, undertook this review. "We are fortunate to have many strong partnerships within Biodiversity Stewardship in South Africa, and our work has illustrated how these public-private partnerships may be maximised to enhance outcomes for conservation and society," comments Wright.

The project also included a review of the diverse suite of models for securing land for conservation, specifically focusing on the novel, alternative mechanisms which have arisen in recent times. Importantly, the review shows that these alternative mechanisms are able to enhance inclusivity in conservation, by allowing for partnerships with stakeholders who may not previously have been involved, including rural community groups, communal property associations and the commercial agricultural sector.

The mechanisms also often allow for a variety of conservation compatible land-uses within their boundaries. It may not be possible to establish protected areas throughout an entire landscape, and the alternative mechanisms can act to bridge those gaps by facilitating conservation in combination with other land-uses. Partnerships with agriculture provide benefits for conservation whilst ensuring food security and maintaining jobs.

“These options can be used as stepping stones to more formal, long-term conservation action. They can encourage initial involvement in conservation and subsequently upskill and empower stakeholders to make stronger commitments to conservation. South Africa’s suite of conservation areas have an essential role to play in mainstreaming biodiversity conservation into other sectors, facilitating connectivity across the landscape, and engaging a wide diversity of stakeholders. At a time when biodiversity faces ever increasing threats, South Africa’s conservation community is constantly innovating and rising to the challenge of protecting our incredible natural heritage”, concludes Wright.

The *Enhancing NGO involvement in protected area expansion* Project was funded by the Table Mountain Fund.

The two reports may be accessed from the BirdLife South Africa website:

<https://www.birdlife.org.za/what-we-do/important-bird-and-biodiversity-areas/media-and-resources/#1553597058075-e6e6840e-611c>

QUOTES

Daniel Marnewick, IBA Programme Manager for BirdLife South Africa:

Long gone are the days of protected areas with a ‘fences and fines’ mentality. Today our important natural landscapes are mosaics of different conservation areas that are able to speak to nature conservation, economic development, community development, and food and water production. South Africa is at the forefront globally of developing these landscapes.

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

As the conservation agency with a mandate for the conservation of the rich biodiversity of the Western Cape, CapeNature developed the innovative Biodiversity Stewardship Programme, recognising that 80% of land crucial for biodiversity conservation does not lie within formally protected areas, but is privately or communally owned land. The programme allows these landowners to make an important contribution towards ensuring the protection of our natural heritage. CapeNature has formed a number of strong partnerships with both government and non-government organisations in the province and is instrumental in ensuring that the objectives of the Western Cape Protected Area Expansion Strategy are achieved and effectively managed. The energy that Birdlife SA, enabled by the Table Mountain Fund, has put into this work and exploring alternative mechanisms for land protection has made a valuable contribution to conservation in the Western Cape and South Africa.

Kerry Maree, Manager: Table Mountain Fund:

This project has nurtured close collaborations between the state and prominent NGOs involved in Protected Area expansion. It resonates well with the ethos of the Table Mountain Fund which aims to empower all to work together to protect the Cape Floristic Region.

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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

About Table Mountain Fund

- The Table Mountain Fund is a capital conservation trust fund dedicated to financing conservation of the Cape Floral Kingdom.
- It was established in 1998 and has, to date, supported over 300 projects and disbursed more than R70 million towards fynbos conservation over the last two decades.
- The Table Mountain Fund is an associated trust of WWF-SA.
- For more information, visit www.thetablemountainfund.org.za

