



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

**For immediate release**

### **International Star recognition for BirdLife South Africa Wakkerstroom Tourism and Education Centre**

**9 November 2022** – BirdLife South Africa’s Wakkerstroom Tourism and Education Centre has today been recognised as one of the world’s best wetland visitor centres. Their success was announced at the Convention on Wetlands, known as Ramsar COP14, underway in Geneva, Switzerland.

The Star Wetland Centre Award is a new initiative to recognise best practice in eco-tourism and education at wetlands. It is coordinated by Wetland Link International (WLI), a support network for staff and volunteers at 300 wetland visitor centres.

Wakkerstroom Tourism and Education Centre is one of 23 awardees who have been selected by an international panel of experienced wetlands professionals.

“The judges were particularly struck by the quality of signage and visitor interpretation”, says Chris Rostron, the Head of WLI and leader of the Star Awards process. “They work with local groups on scientific knowledge, livelihoods, and sustainable behaviour, showing how beneficial a wetland visitor centre can be to its community.”

“We are honoured that the Wakkerstroom Tourism and Education Centre has been recognised as among the world’s best in wetland eco-tourism and education. BirdLife South Africa would like to thank Wetland Link International, the Star Wetland Centre Awards and the dedicated team, volunteers and Wakkerstroom community who make the centre the world-class learning experience that it is”, says Mark D. Anderson, Chief Executive Officer at BirdLife South Africa.

The Stars have been awarded to 23 wetland visitor centres around the world, at a ceremony at the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Wetlands, Ramsar COP14.

**Ends**



### **About BirdLife South Africa Wakkerstroom Tourism and Education Centre**

The BirdLife South Africa Wakkerstroom Centre began its journey in 1999 with a donation to purchase land adjacent to the Wakkerstroom Wetland, to create a multi-functional ecotourism and conservation centre. The aim was, and still is, to promote the conservation of the Grassland Biosphere Reserve as a whole, and on a more local level, work with the people of Wakkerstroom to add value to the area's already diverse natural heritage.

One of the main functions is to attract visitors to Wakkerstroom, many of whom are birders. By actively promoting birding and environmental education, the Centre injects income into all sectors of the local community. The Centre also serves as a hub for information about the region, the local 700 hectare wetland, local history, associated biodiversity and a base from which our education staff service the broader area. There are many collaborative projects that our staff work on with both government departments and local associations, all for the conservation of this vitally important area.

Our Centre was recognised in 2014 as the first Eco-Centre in Mpumalanga in the Eco-Schools Programme, which focuses on our community recycling project, our ever important education work with close on 11 000 learners across 35 local schools, and our partnership with the Working on Fire team. Our current initiative supports three Junior Bird Clubs, meeting with each group on a weekly basis where the learners engage with various aspects of the wetland.

Contact Kristi Anne Garland, Centre Manager, on [kristi.garland@birdlife.org.za](mailto:kristi.garland@birdlife.org.za)

### **About Wetland Link International**

Wetland Link International (WLI) is a global network of wetland education centres. We define a wetland education centre as 'any wetland where there is interaction between people and wildlife, and CEPA (communications, education and public awareness) activity occurs in support of wetland conservation aims. WLI is supported by two staff, based at the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT) at Slimbridge, UK; and a strong regional presence in Asia lead by the Ramsar Regional Centre – East Asia. These staff, plus occasional volunteers, share news, opportunities, and requests on behalf of the network, by email, Facebook, and Twitter. The emails include two newsletters per year, prepared as PDFs to facilitate printing. We also produce three members' webinars each year.

Contact Chris Rostron, Head of Wetland Link International, on [chris.rostron@wwt.org.uk](mailto:chris.rostron@wwt.org.uk)