



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Celebrating and Building South Africa's Heritage Through Bird Names

[Johannesburg, 31 August 2023] - In a country as culturally rich and diverse as South Africa, with its 12 official languages and its array of wildlife and biodiversity, it does not seem like a plausible reality that a complete list of names for all birds that occur in South Africa is not available in all of these languages. But it is. Prior to 2022, there were complete lists of bird names in only English and Afrikaans. To help change this, BirdLife South Africa and Birda (a global social birding app) have joined forces to create a heritage-inspired birding challenge for Heritage Month this September.

Many speakers of traditional South African languages don't know the names of all the birds that occur in South Africa in their own (mother tongue) language, either because these names have not been documented, or some of the birds are foreign to them.

Through the South African Names for South African Birds ([SANSAB](#)) project, BirdLife South Africa is changing this. They are working with linguists, ornithologists, and birders who speak these languages to come up with lists of bird names, and, where there are gaps in the lists, to workshop species names that reflect not only the languages and the birds' characteristics, but also the culture of the people who speak that language.

A list of bird names was completed last year for South Africa's most widely spoken first language, isiZulu, which was a major milestone. However, to do this unprecedented process justice, it takes time and relies on funding - so they need help to do similar work for the country's other official languages.

Nandi Thobela, who is BirdLife South Africa's Empowering People Programme Manager and was one of the participants involved in workshopping the isiZulu bird names, shares why such a project is so crucial: "A lack of vernacular names was a serious language barrier for isiZulu

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speakers wanting to get involved in anything related to birds, whether that is casual birdwatching, environmental education, conservation or academic study. Not having a name for a bird in your mother tongue also creates a degree of separation from nature. I run environmental education and awareness projects in several communities in KwaZulu-Natal, Gauteng, and Mpumalanga provinces, and these names will be important in getting the message across about the importance of conserving birds and the environment to children and all persons involved.”

### **What can we do to support them?**

BirdLife South Africa and Birda are inviting everyone across the globe to join the SANSAB Heritage Challenge by downloading the free Birda app, looking up at the sky (or even the ground!), and logging 12 bird species (one for every South African official language) during September. They are also asking people, if they are able, to [donate](#) or fundraise for the SANSAB project.

“I was born and raised in South Africa so it was very easy for me to understand the importance of creating names for every bird species in all South African languages. Names are one of the first steps to building connections. SANSAB is a great project and a big part of Birda’s mission is to help people protect and enjoy the birdlife around them,” said John White, Birda CEO, and a keen birdwatcher.

As Nelson Mandela said: “If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart.”

Help us create a future where all South African children have names for the birds around them.

### **SANSAB Heritage Challenge Details:**

**Dates:** 1 - 30 September 2023

**Challenge:** Log 12 species on the free Birda app

**Who is the challenge for?** Everyone! Anyone that enjoys nature and birds will love the challenge.

**Goal:** To get more people to enjoy the birds around them while supporting the SANSAB project.

**Prizes:** When you complete the SANSAB Heritage Challenge you stand a chance to win some great prizes, including a pair of Vortex Diamondback HD 10x42 binoculars and a selection of Birda merchandise.

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**Join the challenge today, have fun and support the SANSAB project:**  
<https://birda.app/sansab>.

Read more about BirdLife South Africa's SANSAB project here: <https://www.birdlife.org.za/what-we-do/empowering-people/what-we-do/#1654518246719-92be2b4b-2f54>.

**Ends**

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Editor's notes

**Photos**



BirdLife South Africa's Empowering People Programme Manager, Nandi Thobela (second from right), with BirdLife South Africa Community Bird Guides and SANSAB team members, Sakhamuzi Mhlongo, Junior Gabela and Themba Mthembu (left to right).

For imagery/artwork of the Birda app or the SANSAB Heritage Challenge, please contact Andy Wassung on [andy.wassung@birdlife.org.za](mailto:andy.wassung@birdlife.org.za), or Natalie White on [natalie@birda.org](mailto:natalie@birda.org).

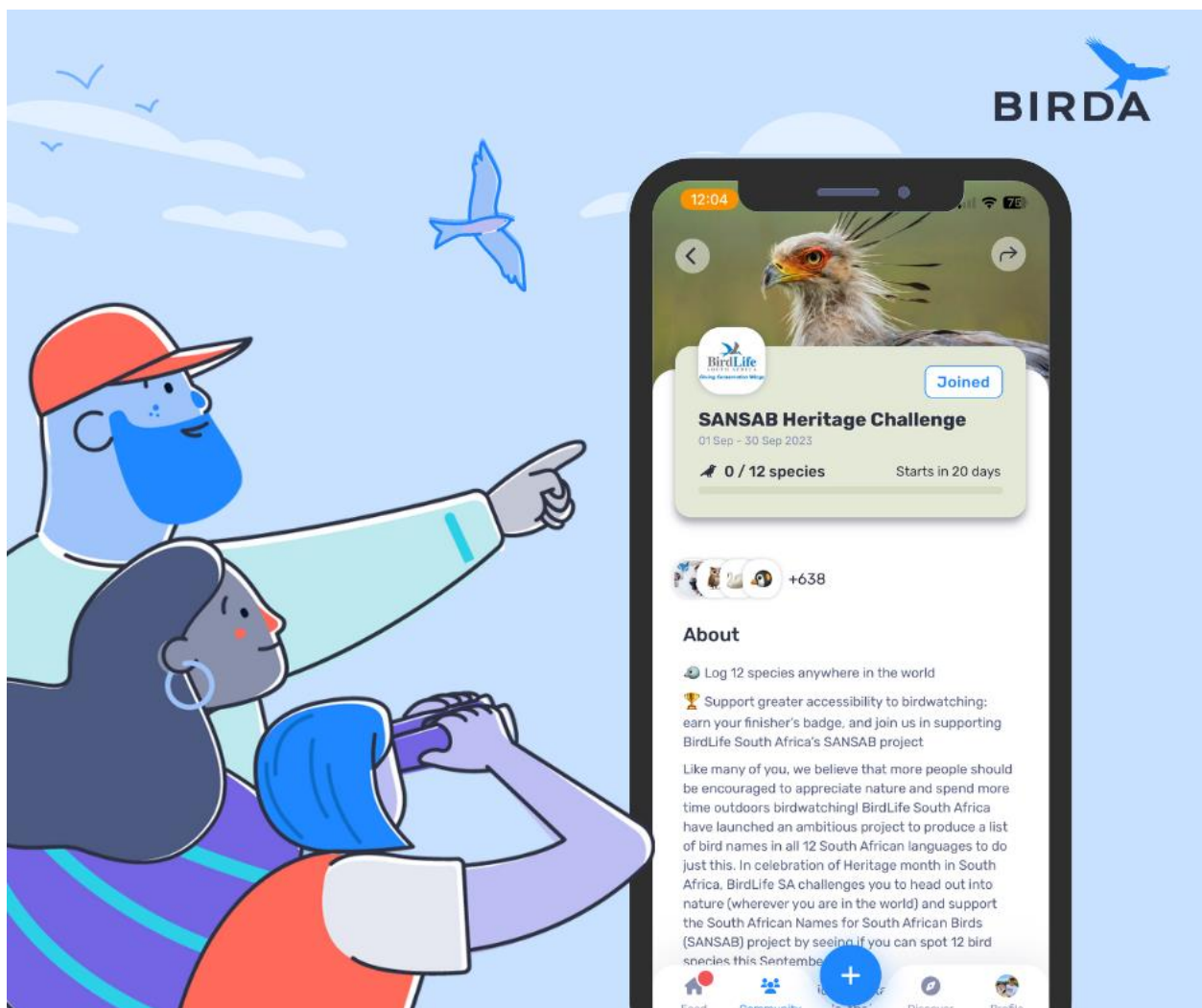
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Birda is a niche social app that turns the discovery and exploration of birdlife and the outdoors into a game by using challenges, leaderboards and fun badges. Birda amplifies the birdwatching experience and helps people discover and learn more about birds, connect to nature, and improve their well-being - all while helping conservation. Cool, right?

Learn more about Birda: <https://birda.org/>



The SANSAB Heritage Challenge screen in the Birda app.

**About BirdLife South Africa:**

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BirdLife South Africa is the country partner of BirdLife International, a global partnership of conservation organisations that strives to conserve birds, their habitats and global biodiversity, by working with people towards sustainability in the use of natural resources. BirdLife International partners operate in more than 120 countries worldwide. BirdLife South Africa relies on donor funding and financial support from the public to carry out its critical conservation work.

Find out more about the SANSAB project here: <https://www.birdlife.org.za/what-we-do/empowering-people/what-we-do/#1654518246719-92be2b4b-2f54>

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