



MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate use

BirdLife South Africa's Verlorenvlei Protected Areas Project gets underway

Cape Town, 2 March 2014:

Verlorenvlei estuary and its water catchment area, which are major conservation priorities on the West Coast, are now on the path to becoming protected areas whilst also maintaining an important role in agriculture in the Sandveld region.

BirdLife South Africa, in partnership with the Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa (WESSA), was recently granted funding from the WWF-Nedbank Green Trust to implement the Verlorenvlei Protected Areas Project. "We are extremely grateful to the WWF-Nedbank Green Trust for recognising the importance of this estuary, including its incredible birdlife" said Dale Wright, BirdLife South Africa's Regional Conservation Manager in the Western Cape. Mr Wright added "The Verlorenvlei estuary, near Elands Bay on the West Coast of the Western Cape, is one of our Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBA), hosting over 200 bird species including significant populations of many threatened and migratory bird species, as well as threatened and endemic fish. The estuary is also a proclaimed Ramsar site, and thus recognised as a wetland of international importance."

These IBA and Ramsar statuses do not however infer formal protection or conservation action at the site, and this new project will attempt to bridge this gap by protecting both the estuary and its principal water catchment area. The Verlorenvlei Protected Areas Project is therefore taking a proactive approach to solving the conservation issues affecting the estuary by looking upstream to additionally protect the Moutonshoek catchment, which supplies 60% of the water to the estuary. Without this water flow, the estuary will cease to be a safe-haven for its incredible biodiversity.

BirdLife South Africa and its partners, which include CapeNature, plan to work with local farmers to protect the Moutonshoek catchment which supplies the Krom Antonies River, the main tributary of the Verlorenvlei estuary. The valley and its catchment are important potato growing areas, and agriculture provides much local employment. Mr Wright further added "Biodiversity Stewardship, a model which is at the forefront of progressive conservation action, will be utilised. This allows for the existing agricultural activities to continue, but with improved environmental management practices in place, thereby allowing the parallel objectives of conservation and sustainable-use of the landscape to work hand in hand."

Samantha Schroder has taken up the position of Project Manager at BirdLife South Africa. Samantha will receive further guidance from the Greater Cedarberg Biodiversity Corridor Unit, within which the Verlorenvlei Project area falls, and WESSA, who have worked extensively to promote sustainability at this site.

The project will start with meetings with farmers and other role players in the area. It is important that the needs of the farmers and other land users are recognised in order to generate the kind of positive collaboration required for true landscape sustainability. The existing Verlorenvlei Estuary Management Forum which comprises key stakeholders concerned with the conservation and wise-use of the estuary will provide an important platform from which to launch this ambitious project.

Ends

For further information, please contact: Dale Wright at dale.wright@birdlife.org.za (072-5623946) or Samantha Schroder at samantha.schroder@birdlife.org.za.

Notes to Editors:

- BirdLife South Africa's vision is to promote the conservation, research, understanding, observation of and enjoyment of natural birds, and their habitats. 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. For more information, visit www.birdlife.org.za.
- WESSA (the Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa) is a South African environmental organisation with a mission to implement high impact environmental and conservation projects which promote public participation in caring for the Earth. With a remarkable 87 year history, WESSA has a strong track record of delivering human capacity development projects by working in strategic partnerships, thus enabling people to make more sustainable lifestyle and environmental management choices. Critical focus areas include life-supporting eco-systems such as water, energy and biodiversity.
- WWF-SA Nedbank Green Trust was co-founded by Nedbank and WWF-SA in 1990, is a mutually beneficial partnership between Nedbank and WWF-SA, which supports nature conservation projects through community-based programmes. The Trust is funded through the Nedbank Green Affinity Programme where clients who opt for the competitively positioned Nedbank Green Affinity bank, investment account or insurance policy, can contribute to the Trust at no cost. The WWF Nedbank Green Trust, through the Programme, has helped raise nearly R150 million for the funding of just under 200 conservation projects.